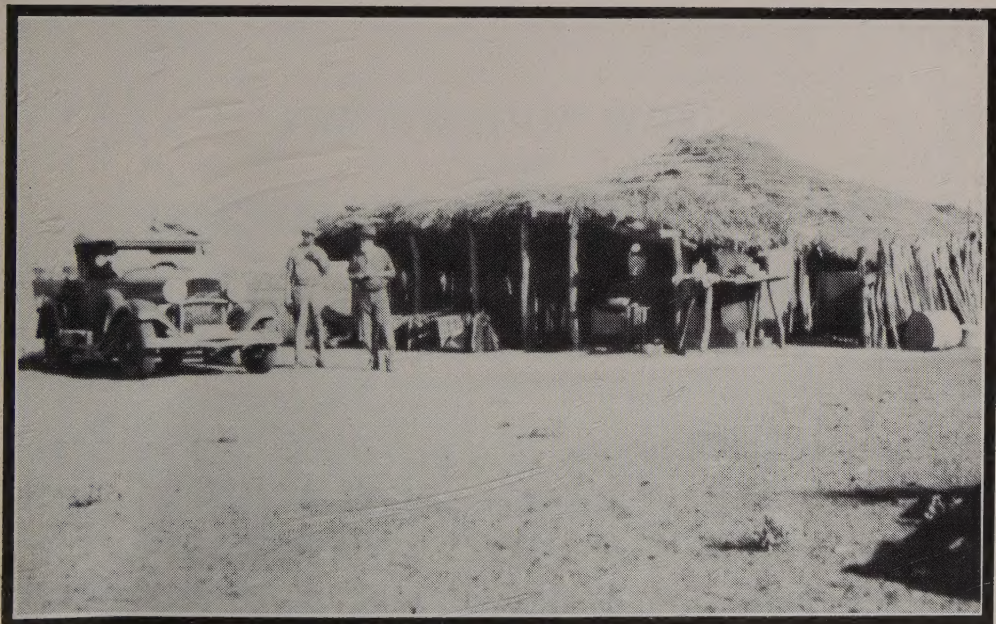


# A HISTORY OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA VOLUME II

## *THE CONISTON STORY AND TALES OF THE NORTH WEST SECTOR*



*Coniston Station 1930's*

*by Bryan Bowman*

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## **OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR**

**The Glen Helen Story - 1st Edition printed 1985**

**2nd Edition printed 1989**

**History of Central Australia Volume I - Printed 1989**

A HISTORY OF  
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA  
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AND  
TALES OF THE NORTH WEST SECTOR*

*by Bryan Bowman*





*Old Granites prospectors: Atherton on left, Drover Larkin on right.*



*At the Well, The Granites.*



## THE CONISTON STORY AND TALES OF THE NORTH WEST SECTOR

I acquired Coniston in August 1946, I had been wanting to extend the business for some years and had been negotiating to buy Tempe back, but these negotiations proved fruitless. One mail day in July 1946 there was a letter from Wally Mengessen of Goldsborough Mort, suggesting that I buy Coniston from Randal Stafford. The price was £30,000 which seemed out this world for me. However, I made an appointment to meet Mr Mengessen in Alice Springs in about a weeks time, and one bitterly cold day in early August set out for Alice Springs on the old AJS motor bike, making Alice Springs about 2pm feeling more like a block of ice than anything else. I certainly didn't feel like buying Coniston and intended to thank Mr Mengessen for his offer and go out into the scrub somewhere, make a big fire and try to get warm again. However, Mr Mengessen was a master salesman and didn't take long to make me think otherwise and put my misgivings at rest about going into such a big deal. He said "It's not so much the money you have to put into it but with your record on Tempe we regard you as good an asset we have on the books". So after supper and a drink at the Stuart Arms, Wally Mengessen was an unusual kind of Stock Agent in that he didn't drink but smoked endless cigars, we started out for Coniston.

We went as far as Aileron that night and enjoyed the hospitality of Fred and Mrs Colson at the old Aileron Hotel. The next day we pushed on to Coniston, a distance of about 75 miles, calling in at Pine Hill for a drink of tea with Jack Dowler and his mother. We made Coniston about 11.30am, we had a brief discussion on the sale and started on the inspection as soon as lunch was finished. We had looked at two of the bores coming out as they are in sight of the main road. We first went about 5 miles north to the famous Ariqua waterhole which was the only permanent natural water on Coniston. Its situated just below the junction of the Warburton and the Crown, Stafford said when he first came out into the country it was 20 feet deep, but of recent times the waterhole had filled up with sand and now there was only a small sheet of water on the western bank. But you could always get unlimited soakage water by sinking a hole in the sand, it was equipped with a windmill, tank and troughs. The mill pumped from a soakage well on the side of the creek. Ariqua waterhole was the scene of much of the shooting in the Coniston massacre.

There appeared to be a lot of cattle watering on the troughs including some very fine bullocks, old Stafford took a great pride in the superior breeding of his cattle and he certainly had produced a very fine herd.



We soon saw all that was of interest to a prospective buyer and returned to Coniston.

As it was still early we decided to visit Borowie Well that afternoon and proceeded about 4 miles in a westerly direction to the well. It was equipped with a mill, tank and troughs but the well was such a poor supply that it wouldn't fill the tank. We returned to Coniston just as the sun was setting and spent the evening at the Station.

The next day was the general inspection of the whole Station and we should have made an early start but Mr Stafford incurred the wrath of Mr Mengessen by insisting on cooking the bread before leaving. Eventually we got away about 10am. We had a quick look at Block Hill and the Lander bores as we had seen them on the way out from Alice Springs. Block Hill was the first bore to be found and equipped on Coniston, it was at this stage a supply of about 600 gallons per hour, equipped with a Southern Cross windmill and a MacDonald diesel engine. In those days the wheel of the Southern Cross mill had insufficient sail space and was under powered, only working satisfactorily in a very strong wind, a very different proposition to the magnificent Southern Cross Mill of today. The MacDonald diesel engine was not a very satisfactory engine, after two years of service they tended to overheat and stop after about half an hours running, this isn't much good when the bore is only making 600 gallons per hour. The Lander bore was much the same only it was equipped with a Comet Mill which has always been noted for running in light winds. The supply of the Lander Bore was only 300 gallons per hour, it was equipped with a MacDonald diesel engine and didn't seem capable of watering many cattle.

From the Lander we went about 10 miles east to Ninta Brinna, there were no cattle watering on this bore, it was equipped but was a freak bore - a drift sand as fine as face powder came in with the water and at this stage had half filled the tank with this fine drift. The bore as it stood didn't seem much of an asset but the water was really good drinking water with a supply of over a 1000 gallons per hour if the drift was slush pumped out before starting pumping. It seemed that it might be improved by further experimenting.

Several water specialists had been consulted with a view to making a screen for the inlet of the pump but all said that any gauze that could be constructed would be so fine that it wouldn't let the water through.

We then proceeded through some very fine cattle country, most of which was too far from any known water, and eventually arrived at the Leichhardt Bore. This bore had a good supply of water but the water



was of very poor quality and could only be classed as stock water. From there we went round the point of the Mt Stafford Range to the Tin Field Bore. This was probably the best bore on the Station as it had a reasonably good supply and was good drinking water. It got its name of Tin Field Bore from the fact that it was sunk to service the surrounding tin mines which were one of old Stafford's pet projects. I think it was originally discovered by Ben Nicker who got Stafford interested in financing it. They tried to interest several of the big mining companies in it, including the mighty BHP, but they all said the same thing, if the ore had gone just one per cent more it would have been worth a lot of money. As it stood it was not a viable project for a company.

But Stafford wouldn't take no for an answer saying that the companies were rubbishing the show in order to get it cheaper, even though they said they didn't want it at any price. Stafford tried working it himself and took a considerable amount of tin out of it but it was not financially successful.

It was getting late and although the Tin Field Bore was only 8 miles from the Station it was just getting dark when we arrived home. After supper I had a brief conversation with Mr Mengessen, I had several urgent reasons for closing the deal. Firstly there were far too many cattle on Glen Helen relative to the amount of water and feed available and I would have had to drastically reduce the herd at store cattle values. It was extremely dry on Glen Helen in 1946, in fact we hadn't had a really good rain on the Glen since March 1944. The whole Station was eaten bare and we only had two permanent wells and the water along the Finke, but there was no feed at all in this area and it was a death trap for stock. We retired to Stafford's office and after a very brief discussion we signed the sale agreement and I found myself the owner of yet another Station. I have bought Stations since this but I have always marvelled at how easy it is, there is much more argument and bargaining over a second hand motor car or a town house.

We returned to Alice Springs next day with the understanding that I took over the Station in 30 days time. I finally took over at Coniston on 25 August 1946 and now had time to take stock of the situation. It was apparent that it wasn't as easy a proposition as it appeared at first glance. It is true that it had a very fine herd of cattle and they had been worked very well. Stafford dehorned all the male calves which made the grown bullocks much easier to work and tended to reduce losses on the long 3 days in the trucks on the trip to Adelaide. However, the numbers were considerably less than what was stated in the sale agreement. Secondly there was not enough water on the place for any large number of cattle in dry seasons.



There is very little surface water on Coniston 6 months after the big creeks have run, and I had counted on agisting at least a thousand Glen Helen cattle on Coniston. To make matters worse the pumping plant was in very poor shape.

The Station as a whole however is 100% good cattle country but more suitable for breeding than fattening cattle. This is due to the fact that there are very few flooded areas, it is mostly grass country, and while cattle do very well on grass they never get the ultimate finish that they do on flooded areas with their wealth of soft herbage. As Glen Helen has plenty of this kind of country it didn't really matter very much. In fact over the 30 odd years I controlled the Station it proved a very useful combination.

Another fact that made the Coniston/Glen Helen combination very useful was that they seem to be in different rainfall belts and when Coniston was suffering from drought conditions Glen Helen had plenty of feed and we could agist Coniston cattle there and vice versa and I never regretted buying Coniston.

Coniston as a Station had a very tragic history, Abo massacres, murders and suicide. Quite enough has been written about the Coniston Massacre without me doing yet another version. I will say however that I don't think it was ever regarded by the Aboriginal people themselves as the awful atrocity represented by the Missionaries and most other white people who didn't have to live amongst the Blacks. The Blacks themselves regarded it as a normal payback incident as they would have done themselves. Secondly the police did very little shooting, it was the police trackers, including the notorious Police Paddy, that got out of hand and eagerly seized the opportunity to pay off a few scores of their own.

For the first few years Stafford held Coniston, it was all hard work. Life was hard but pleasant and Stafford and a few stock boys worked the cattle - stock water was scarce and they watered their cattle from soakages along the Warburton and Lander. These soaks only lasted about 6 months after a rain and required constant cleaning out in dry times. The only permanent water for stock was the Ariqua waterhole and a few soaks along the Warburton that had to be bailed with the old whip and bucket style.

There were incidents with the Blacks from time to time but there was no serious trouble, though it is said that he narrowly escaped getting murdered several times and was saved by his faithful girlfriend Alice. But when the Granites Gold Rush came and went a lot of queer



characters came into the country and black and white never work well together.

In spite of this fact Stafford gave several of these characters a job. They were all heavy drinkers, alcoholics, and Coniston that had up to now been free of grog, became notorious. Stafford didn't drink himself and had the mistaken idea he could help these people by keeping them out of the Town, but this is an idle dream, though Stafford is by no means the only man who ever dreamt it.

Grog will find its way to any place where there are people who want to drink it. He had a white stockman, Baker, in the cattle camp, Baker was a dead shot with either rifle or revolver but he was probably a bit mad. It is said of him that on one occasion there were several lumpy bullocks to be shot and Stafford instructed Baker to carry out the execution. Baker rode through the mob, picked out the lumpies and shot them one after the other without a miss. As each bullock hit the ground and lay still he would courteously raise his hat to the dead and move on to the next one.

Somewhere about 1943 or 1944 Stafford went to Adelaide for a holiday. He left Baker in charge of the stock and the Homestead in charge of the cook, Woodford, but as soon as Stafford was out of sight they got a cargo of grog from somewhere, probably Barrow Creek, and the rest of the story is an alcoholic nightmare. Eventually they started fighting, it is said over Stafford's girl friend Alice, Baker shot Woodford dead, then set the house on fire and shot himself.

At this time the buildings on Coniston were all constructed of bush material, 75% spinifex which burns like high octane petrol, and the pair of them were burnt to ashes. The ashes were hardly cold when Stafford arrived back from his holiday in Len Tuit's truck. As Len told the story "There was Woody's head in the ashes with stuff running out of his nose like a bullock's head being cooked in the coals".

It was either just before or just after the big massacre that the Blacks made an attack on Nugget Morton of Anningie Station who was agisting his cattle on what is known as the Whitestone Soak. Coniston held the country on grazing licence, but during the 1927-30 drought several other Stations agisted cattle on it. The Lander River here splits into channels and grows feed of a very high food value and although the block, other than this patch, has only sand hills and spinifex, it is a very soft variety and has proved to be one of the best standbys for drought a Station can have.



One evening Nugget and his stock boys had yarded their cattle, boiled the billys and were having supper when a boy came up behind Morton and asked him for another slice of damper and meat. Nugget cut off the meat and damper and handed it back to the stock boy without looking around, instead of taking the damper from Nugget the boy seized Nugget around the neck holding him tight, immediately several other Abos came out of the scrub and started beating Morton over the head with boomerangs. But Morton was a man of more than usual strength and he managed to break the hold, got hold of his revolver and shot his original attacker dead. The others then vanished into the scrub. I think the police caught up with them later.

After World War 2 there was a vast accumulation of military stores and equipment suitable for pastoral and civilian use returned to Alice Springs. Stafford became a keen bidder at these sales, he bought at least 3 Sydney William Huts, several motor vehicles, including a Blitz Buggy, but the most useful thing he acquired was a Southern Cross No. 2 boring plant and proceeded to improve the water position. It was desperately necessary, all through the war years they had battled along, watering their cattle on soaks along the Warburton and Lander.

Coniston had come through the 1927 drought without any noticeable loss and during the period between the end of the big drought and the start of the War and numbers had built up considerably and could no longer depend on purely surface water. Once Stafford acquired the boring plant Coniston soon had 5 bores, but none of them had a very good supply, some of them were not drilled straight and were rough on pump rods, and he made the worst mistake of all by equipping 2 of them with second hand MacDonald diesel engines that had done many hours of service out at the Granites. After about an hours pumping they would overheat and stop and couldn't be started again until they had cooled down. As the bores that they were on only made 350 and 600 an hour it can be seen that it would be a long business filling a 20,000 gallon tank.

On acquiring the boring plant Stafford engaged Fred Roberts to operate his plant. Fred was quite an interesting character in his way, I think I am right in saying that he was born in England, served in the British Army during World War 1 and was the only man I have met who had actually been to Russia. He served in the force that Churchill sent to Russia when the Revolution was on and came to Australia after the war and acquired his experience of drilling with Horwood Bagshaw in South Australia. But I regret to say he was an alcoholic of alcoholics and must have spent a sizeable percentage of his life in the DTS. During the time he was in Russia he must have served in firing squads and when he was properly under the influence he would stand up against



the nearest wall, give the appropriate orders and drop dead. When he got up again he would say "I am full of lead, the little ones don't matter much but the big ones are bloody hell".

The alcoholic adventures of poor old Fred would fill a book on their own. As a Well Borer he had two bad faults, the first was that as soon as he struck water he wanted to stop even if the supply was only 300 gallons an hour or so. The second was that he just couldn't keep the hole straight and wouldn't make any attempts to straighten it, this was probably due to the fact that he was never entirely sober.

I might as well now bring the rather sad story of old Fred to its tragic conclusion rather than proceeding with the main story. It was when he was sinking a bore at Bowerie on Coniston on contract. He got an advance payment from Stafford, he said to buy tucker for himself and his offsider, a boy called Roderick, and to send some money to his wife who lived in Adelaide. Roderick was a superior type of Boy and could operate the plant at a pinch and was absolutely devoted to Fred. Fred may have got enough tucker for the camp but he never sent any money to his wife and spent the balance on a large quantity of cheap wine, coffin varnish he used to call it. I regret to say this lot was the first coat.

He returned to his camp at Borowie and started up the plant but next day at daylight Roderick turned up at the Station to say that Fred had gone completely mad and he had spent the night chasing him through the scrub and bringing him back to camp. Stafford and Ted McCormack went back with Roderick to Bowerie and there was Fred conducting firing squads against the boring plant, on seeing them he took off into the scrub again. Roderick was a powerful man for an Aboriginal and could run like a greyhound and soon brought him back. They could see that it would be dangerous to leave him camped in the bush so they took him into the Station but as his condition didn't improve they sent him into Alice Springs to the hospital.

The trip was a nightmare for the driver, a young halfcaste boy from Hermannsburg, Emanuel Mack and Roderick. They used a Blitz Buggy that Stafford had bought at the Disposal Sales. At first glance it looked an ideal vehicle for the job but they made the fatal mistake of not locking the back door once they got him into the back compartment. All went well for the first 60 miles and they reached the bitumen without any serious incident.

In those days the turnoff road to Coniston came onto the bitumen about 2 miles north of Prowse Gap, there is a long fairly steep gradient from

the turnoff to Prowse Gap and onreaching the summit they stopped to check their radiator and see how Fred was faring.

There was a sliding window behind the driver's seat on the old Blitz Buggy and on opening this the driver was horrified to see no Fred and the back door wide open. Blitzes were never speed vehicles and when coming up the gradient wouldn't have been doing more than 4 or 5 miles per hour and Fred had seized his opportunity. He opened the back door, carefully lowered the steps and stepped off onto the road and off into the scrub once more.

Now the question was just how far back had he got out, he could have been anywhere between Prowse Gap and Coniston, a distance of about 60 miles, fortunately however they hadn't far to look. On turning back they had only gone about 500 yards when Roderick, who was one of the old time trackers and had eyes like a radio telescope, spotted his tracks in the loose dirt on the side of the bitumen, from there he tracked him through the scrub for about 2 miles and eventually brought him back. The door was properly secured this time and they made the hospital with only minor incidents, but there is no doubt that Roberts owed his life on this occasion to Roderick's skill in the bush.

On reaching the hospital the Doctors there couldn't do much for him as there were no facilities for dealing with this sort of case in Alice Springs and as a matter of fact there are still no facilities for dealing with mental sickness even now.

He was sent on to Northfield but at this stage the Doctors would not certify him insane. So he went home to his wife, who I think lived at either Hindmarsh or Thebarton, but he started drinking again and eventually ran out of money. His wife wouldn't give him any more so he decided to cut his throat, he made quite elaborate preparations for the deed, putting a chair in the middle of the room and a basin at the back of the chair, he then sat reversed on the chair, lent over the back of the chair and cut his throat with a razor. By some miracle he missed the jugular vein but passed out and was found unconscious on the floor, taken to the hospital and lived to sink bores again. After being discharged from the hospital he had a brief holiday with his wife and managed to keep off the grog returning to Coniston, just before I bought the place.

When I took over I agreed, with some misgiving but largely on the recommendation of Goldsborough Mort, to let him take the plant on contract, specially as it was desperately necessary for Glen Helen to get more water, so I gave him a contract to do 4 bores on Glen Helen and



then return to Coniston and do 4 more. But I had another think coming. The first, "The Crossing", was a disgraceful piece of work technically, but it has proved a good bore over 43 years and has watered thousands of Glen Helen cattle and is still in use. But the other 2 were a different story. One had no water in it at all and bottomed on granite at 101 ft, the next one "Bullocky No 1" had quite a bit of water in it and Roberts represented it as a unlimited supply, but we didn't get round to testing it with a power pump as Fred wanted to get away on a booze up, he was away about 3 weeks.

Meantime Hermannsburg approached me to do a boring job for them with the Coniston plant, I eventually agreed to let Fred take the plant to Hermannsburg but with the gravest misgivings. Firstly Fred wasn't the sort of person one normally expects to find on a Mission Station and secondly there was always plenty of wine at Hermannsburg, but their water position was even more acute than my own. However, Fred went to Hermannsburg with the plant and did some boring without success, then he started drinking again, the DTS came on and he found himself back in hospital again.

This time the medical people didn't muck around and he was sent south where he was thoroughly examined by a specialist and admitted to Northfield. In the course of his examination by the specialist he was asked what his occupation was, he replied "I am a Well Borer", "What is that?" replied the Doctor "Oh" said Fred "I look for water underground", "Indeed" replied the Doctor "Did you ever find any whisky in any of the holes?" "No" replied Fred "I was never that fortunate Doctor".

The outcome of it all was that he didn't have genuine DTS at all but a Paranoia brought on by alcohol and due to his experiences in Russia. This was the last I saw of poor old Fred. He was eventually discharged from Northfield with a certificate to say he was sane and if, when he was drinking in a Pub, someone said "Buzz off Fred you're mad" he would promptly produce the certificate and say "See I've got a certificate to say I'm sane and that's more than you've got". But time was running out for Fred, he lived for about 3 more years and then made yet another attempt at suicide by cutting his throat, this time he succeeded.

One of my main objects in buying Coniston was to relieve the pressure of numbers on Glen Helen where I had far too many cattle, and on the first inspection it looked as though Coniston would be ideal for this. Unfortunately there was just sufficient water on the place for the cattle that were already on it, owing to the poor supply of water in the bores and the poor condition of the pumping plant.

In very windy weather the mills, which were new and in good condition, kept the water up to the stock but if the wind fell away and the engines had to be started it was a 24 hour a day job keeping the stock watered.

I decided to try a small mob from Glen Helen, 600, but it was a mistake, the extra drain on the pumping plant caused it to pack up altogether and, for a while, the situation was grim. A few days before Christmas 1946 we had I think 10 inches of rain, the creeks were running a banker and our troubles were over for the time being. The storms persisted right into January and the country was too wet and boggy to hope to move by motor transport.

Christmas Day on Coniston 1946 was probably the soberest for many years as there was no means of getting any alcoholic supplies and my own problem was to get over to Glen Helen where the staff, who were mostly from Hermannsburg, were waiting to get paid off for the usual Christmas trip to the Mission. They never went to Alice Springs in those days.

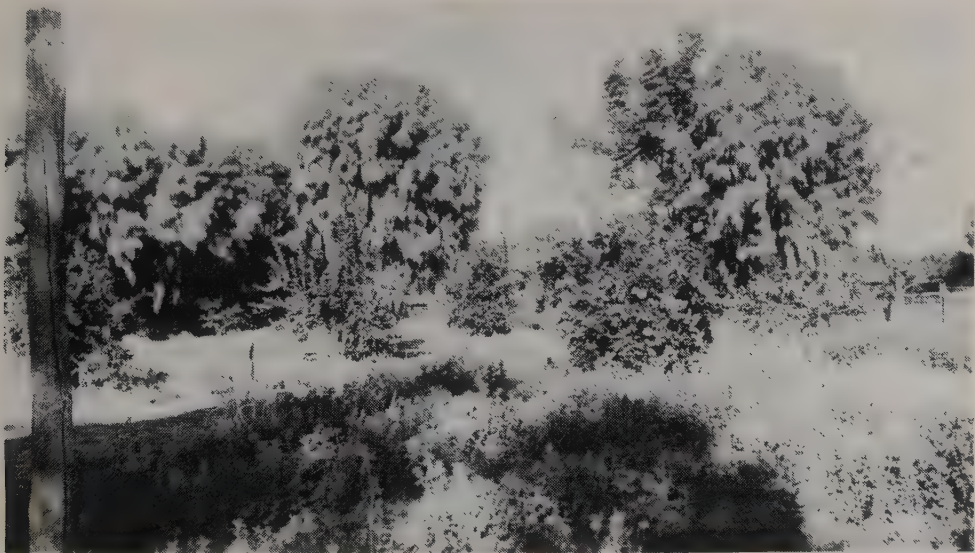
The sun was shining again on Boxing Day and we put the day in killing snakes, I have never seen so many snakes anywhere. Coniston was always a bad place for snakes. The Warburton River, on which the old Homestead was situated, is not very deep and the channel spreads out over 500 or 600 yards, it was choked with reeds and bulrushes, making an ideal breeding ground for snakes. When a flood came down the snakes went visiting onto higher ground. In addition to this there was an old baker's oven, built mostly of clay, and if I remember rightly we got 5 snakes when we first lit a fire in it, it hadn't been used for years.

In all the 30 odd years I was at Coniston I never heard of anyone getting bitten by a snake, but the old Homestead was always swarming with them. After the big floods in 1974 a snake was killed in the kitchen which was identified by the entomologist in Alice Springs as a Western Brown - I was struck by its resemblance to a Taipan which I had seen in the Roper River country and sent it in for identification.

Another feature of Coniston in flood time was the frog chorus, it had to be heard to be appreciated. Nowhere, even in the Top End, have I heard so many frogs. Sitting on the verandah, which is about 75 yards from the creek bank, it was hard to hear what anyone sitting alongside you was saying. When a flood was coming down the Warburton you could hear the frogs 2 miles away and as the water got nearer the frogs got louder. One thing it always gave us plenty of warning when a flood was coming, giving us plenty of time to get everything out of the creek.



*Coniston Station - 1930's.*



*Bed of the Lander River - 1946, choked with scrub.  
Water holes ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes and snakes.*



The water in the Lander and Warburton was very slow compared with the raging torrents of the Western Macdonnells.

The snakes of Coniston were no doubt a potential hazard, but as I said earlier no one ever got bitten in my time. Some people thought the frogs were both interesting and amusing, but what few could put up with at Coniston were the mosquitos. Nowhere, even in the Top End, have I seen them worse than anywhere along the Warburton and Lander Rivers. The beds of these rivers are not all clean sand as in the Macdonnell ranges, some places are of a sort of loam choked with wattle scrub and strings of small water holes sheltered by reeds and scrub, ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

When H H Finlayson, the expert on marsupial mammals, stayed for a few weeks at the Station, the mossies nearly drove him mad. He suggested applying kerosene to 2 large sheets of stagnant water right in front of the house, it did reduce the numbers a bit but you had to renew the kerosene every day or so.

Before leaving the snakes of Coniston to their dark and damp hideouts in the rushes and scrub, I must mention a vicious reptile seen by some, but not by others, in the vicinity of Coniston. It was the Methylated Adda, they ranged from pink to green and were said to breed in the Stuart Arms and Underdown's.

The story is told of a man who woke from a troubled sleep to see one coiled up at the foot of his bed smoking a cigarette, said the alcoholic to the serpent, "If you're a green snake you are in for a hell of a time but if you're not a green snake then I am".

The policy of the Administration after the first World War was to create new leases by resuming large undeveloped areas from the established Stations. There has been much debate on the rights and wrongs of this policy, on one hand you had the pioneer pastoralist who took up large areas of land and held it through long and difficult years, often at considerable personal risk, on the other hand you had the incoming settlers, many of them ex service men who had seen service in the Territory during the war and hoped to make a home for themselves and families in the NT.

And then there was another class, men who had done well out of the war, mainly in the Hotel trade, and were looking for somewhere to get it out of the hands of the Commissioner of Taxation, at this time primary production was Tax Exempt in the NT. The pioneer Pastoralists rarely had the means or equipment to develop the large areas they had held for



*Coniston Homestead - June 1946.*



*Vegetable garden Coniston Homestead - 1946.*



years and so development had not been attempted. After years of consideration and observation I have reached the conclusion that the Administration did the right thing by resuming these areas, although I was against it at the time.

Coniston, at the time Stafford took it up, was a much bigger holding than it is today, under the new policy Coniston lost about 30% of its area. This area was attached to the old Cockatoo Creek block which was currently held by Alf Turner, who also held a Grazing Licence to the west of it which is now occupied by the Yuendumu Native Settlement.

The ultimate solution was that the country west of Brook's Soak was taken off Coniston and added to the old Cockatoo Creek Lease and is now Mt Denison. Stafford had an objection pending in the Supreme Court to this resumption at the time of the sale and wanted me to carry it on but I thought better of it. For one thing it would have held up the transfer of the Lease, perhaps for years, and that would have held up finalising the sale. Secondly, with Glen Helen I had quite enough country for my immediate needs. I advised Dicky Ward, who had been instructed by Stafford to take the case to the Supreme Court, that I didn't intend to proceed with it. I have never regretted this decision. Today Mt Denison is the only lease allotted at this time that has remained under much the same ownership and is carried on by Leo Martin's son - as a Station it has done very well.

The first 10 years I had Coniston were an unbroken tale of success, the seasons were reasonably good, the relationship between black and white was good.

There were some very smart black stockmen on Coniston, and the Station was run on 99% Abo labour. One whiteman was employed to service the bores and also was Cook and operated the Flying Doctor Wireless 8GL. In servicing the bores he was assisted by a very able Aboriginal man, Roderick, who had worked with Fred Roberts on the boring plant, there were several other boys that were good on bores to help him in a really bad emergency. Roderick was an outstanding Abo, much above average intelligence, he could drive a motor vehicle and understood most types of stationary engines. He was a Tribal Elder which later was his undoing, he died in suspicious circumstances at Ninta Brinna Bore in 1957.

After the good rains of late 1946 and early 1947 there were really no outstanding problems to be solved immediately, but of course the water problem couldn't be left till the seasons turned dry again. I was fortunate in obtaining the services of Jack Shepley to take over the boring plant.

Jack was one of the most experienced drillers in Australia at this time, he had worked on the artesian bores on the Birdsville Track and had drilled the deepest bore in Australia up to this time at Dicky Dicna. Today it wouldn't be considered a very deep bore, 6000 feet, I believe the oil companies have been down to 15 or 16000 feet but they had a very different type of rig. The old percussion plant was used almost exclusively until the oil companies became interested in Australia as a potential oil producing country. These old percussion plants could do a good job to 300 or 400 feet in most types of country but lacked the power to penetrate granite or dolomite. Good supplies of water can be found in dolomite but not so granite.

The rotary plant revolutionised boring, with the old plants it was sometimes a month's job to sink a 200 foot bore, now days it can be done in 48 hours or less under favourable conditions. But they could penetrate any type of country and this led to water being found in country that formally had been considered hopeless and greatly increased the carrying capacity of the Centre as a whole during the 1970's and 80's.

There were no water problems on Coniston during 1947 and 48 due to a phenomenal rain in August 1947, 6 inches were registered at Coniston during August which is most unusual for this time of the year. Four mobs of fats left the Station totalling 1095 and the market remained at a reasonable level for those days, I have lost the old records of what it actually was but the average would be about £12 or \$24 in today's currency. I have also lost the branding records but the diary at the end of the year read "branding on Coniston fairly satisfactory" and would probably mean 600 or 700 calves.

Altogether it was a most successful start for the Station and laid the foundations for the success it achieved for years to come.

Up to this time, when sending cattle to market, we took them to Alice Springs with the Station plant and I generally went with them on the road, but by 1948 the business had grown to such an extent that this was no longer possible and I had to employ contract drovers. Mort Conway and Tom Williams did all my droving up to about 1960, during this 11 years they moved hundreds of cattle into the Alice Springs trucking yards. I greatly regret I have not got an exact record of just how many, but it would be about 15,000, this figure is arrived at by working on 600 a year from Coniston and the same from Glen Helen for 11 years and adding 200 for one particularly good year when we got rid of 2,200 fats.



In addition to the fat cattle for market Tom Williams handled probably 10,000 store cattle from the Top End, this mainly only entailed taking them from The Sixteen Mile to Glen Helen, but one Station delivery mob from Humbert River, the other side of Victoria Downs, a distance of nearly a 1000 miles, his losses on the road were minimal. Tom was probably the best long distance drover in the Northern Territory, but his failing was grog and some stock owners were loathe to entrust stock to him. But those who knew him intimately knew that no matter how many he lost during the night he could always find them again in the morning.

There was a rather funny incident when he was bringing the Humbert River mob down, he had reached the Wauchope and I got a telegram from the Publican there to say that they were on the grog there and showed no signs of moving.

I was at Coniston at the time and started up to the Wauchope, just past Bonney Well, about 40 miles from the Wauchope, I sighted a fire on the west side of the road and saw it was a cattle camp. It was just after dark, I didn't drive up to the camp as it might have disturbed the cattle which were already on camp, so I drove back to Bonney Well and camped for the night. At first light in the morning I drove back to the cattle camp, Tom and one drover were having breakfast, their tucker on a spread out chaff bag in the middle of which was, what I took to be a bottle of Rum. I got out of the car with blood in my eye but fortunately before I opened up on them I had another look at the bottle in a better light, it was a bottle of coffee essence and I enjoyed a good hot drink of coffee with them which was more than acceptable in the bleak morning wind. On counting the cattle I found the numbers correct.

Another rather humorous story of old Tom happened in Alice Springs. He was holding a mob from the Top End which we had just taken delivery of at the 16 Mile. I came into town to get rations for him for the trip to Glen Helen, I think the cattle were from Elsey. I loaded the truck at Wallis Fogarty's, where the Ansett Offices now stand, and was on the point of driving out when a coloured girl came up to me with a small parcel and said "Will you give this to old Tom", I said "Yes, what is it?" she replied "Its Tom's false teeth", "Wherever did you find them" I asked, "They must have fallen out in my bed" was her reply.

But time was running out for the contract drover. About this time Kurt Johannsen put the first road transport vehicle on the road and most of the contract drovers looked for other work. Mort Conway went into Tourism and achieved considerable success in this difficult business. Tom Williams thought he was getting a bit too old for the stock route and took a job with E J Connellan at Narwietooma. But they needn't have

been in such a hurry as it took some years for road transport to take on. I tried one small mob which were loaded on the transport at Kerosene Well on Pine Hill and didn't like it and continued to use the stock routes until about 1968.

It took some years for road transport to take on and become the highly organised business it is today. At first Johannsen only operated 2 units capable of carrying under 100 head, which meant if the Station had the usual 300, which was the maximum load on the railways in those days, it meant he had to do several trips to the Station and secondly the capacity of his vans did not match up to the capacity of those on the railway. With small mobs of cattle coming in over 3 or 4 days meant a lot of extra work for the Stock Agents. In those days cattle were not fed in the yard as they are today but grazed out in the hills. Some drovers with horses made a good thing, tailing mobs out while waiting for trucks and all this meant quite a steep increase in selling expenses and for some years road transport lapsed.

Johannsen went with Vestys on the long haul from Wave Hill into Queensland. Vestys did a thorough feasibility study of road transport and came up with a design of vehicle that could be operated within the bounds of viability. From then on road transport went steadily ahead, but there were still problems. A whole lot of small operators sprang up and competed mercilessly amongst themselves and I think it was about 6 that survived to form the Cattle Transport Association. One of these was Dicky Rogers and another was Noel Buntine, these two had a better record for reliability than the others. They were always on time to load on the Stations and they serviced the vehicles and never caused any delay on the railways, which I regret to say most of the others did. Dick Rogers built his fleet up to the point when they could move 1000 head over a weekend, Buntine did much the same thing and operated mainly in the Top End, eventually he extended his operations to Queensland and had a depot at Mt Isa. Rogers still operates today as Tanami Transport.

After Williams and Conway gave up droving I tried Road Transport for a time, but it wasn't very satisfactory at this stage. Looking back at the highly organised industry of today you wonder how it ever operated at all. It needs a high degree of co-operation between the Stations, the Stock Agents, the transport drivers and the Railways and this was sadly lacking in the early stages of road transport.

I went back to travelling stock on the hoof and doing it with Station labour but with a difference to the old ways. I formed a contract droving plant composed of men living on the Station.



We had one man, Mick Wagoo, who was a good man on the road but had always had trouble with his eyes, this made it difficult for him to work in the mustering camps but wasn't such a problem on the road. I put him in charge of the droving plant on contract rates, it proved a really good arrangement and was successful till 1968 when regulations imposed by the Dept of Animal Industry, with a view to the coming TB and Brucellosis Campaign, made walking cattle long distances impossible and secondly Mick's eyes were now so bad he was practically blind.

I arranged with Dr Schneider, a noted eye specialist who had recently bought Tempe Downs, to do an operation for him and sent him to Adelaide at the Station's expense. The operation was successful but Mick spoilt it by going out into bright sunlight too soon and went completely blind. I think it was really due to the well intentioned efforts of a Missionary friend who wanted to take him on a motor trip on Sunday afternoon, but the damage was done.

A word here on Aboriginal labour in general wouldn't be out of place. Most people think that there is a prejudice against Aboriginal labour simply because it is Aboriginal. This is not the case. The truth of the matter is that outside the pastoral industry there is no type of work suitable for the bulk of the Aboriginal population in the present state of development. Again most people believe that all Aboriginals are good stockmen, again this is an over statement - as musterers they are superb, mustering is only another form of hunting and they are or were born hunters. However, once the cattle are yarded only a select few are good at handling them, left to themselves they are too rough in working stock.

If you are fortunate enough to have a head stockman who is also a tribal Elder and can keep the younger men under control then you will build up a good team, but once the head stockman gets too old for stock work and a younger man, probably one of his sons, takes over you are in strife. He has grown up in the job with the rest of the team as workmates and they don't recognise his authority.

On Coniston I had 3 of these middle aged men Johnny, Sid and Tiger. While the services of anyone of these 3 men were available to run the Stock Camp all was well but by the early 70's Sid and Johnny were getting too old for stock work, Tiger, being a younger man hadn't the same control over the younger men and the discipline of the Stock Camp started to go down hill.



*Tinfield Bore - only decent water on Coniston, 8 miles from Homestead.*



*Watering cattle on the Lander.*



One of the greatest obstacles to general Aboriginal employment is language. Very few Aboriginals can speak decent English, and fewer still white people have any knowledge of Aboriginal language. There was an article in a recent Advocate "Perkins slams Yirara College", amongst other things he pointed out that a lot of time is wasted teaching the Abos their own language. I couldn't agree more with Mr Perkins on this. Instead of trying to teach them their own language why not teach them to speak decent English which would enhance their prospects of getting employment under modern industrial conditions.

There are several reasons why this is very difficult at present and is what leads a lot of people to think there is a prejudice against employing Aboriginals. First we have the language problem, this is not entirely the fault of the Education Department, but to the language standard spoken at home. Where the Education Department has failed is to realise that the Aboriginal way of thinking is entirely different to ours and although trying to speak English they think in their own language. In this respect institutions like Yirara where kids board away from home and only hear correct English spoken show better results than kids that have only gone to the day schools.

Another thing that makes education difficult for Aboriginals under our education system is that the Aboriginal can learn practically nothing by explanation but can learn to do anything by demonstration. The full bloods seem to have no power of abstract thought and can not absorb the theory, but if they watch you doing any given thing, its not long before they are doing it themselves - probably better than you can. I had a boy on Coniston that couldn't have told you the difference between volts and amps but he could pick an electrical fault on the car quicker than I could.

The big killer to Aboriginal progress is the poor attendance at schools and the general lack of interest shown in it by both parents and pupils.

## THE CONISTON SCHOOL

In 1968 we opened a school for the Station children at Coniston, entirely independent of the official Education Department. At the time it seemed a good idea but it turned out to be one of the biggest mistakes I ever made.

At this time Welfare and the various Aboriginal Societies were starting to really push the issues of Land Rights and living conditions, they had already got Award Wages. The position at Coniston was rather difficult in this respect as there was insufficient supplies of good water for any great development. One of the Tribal Elders who had a very large family was keen to get them educated but the Government were not prepared to put up a school without upgrading living conditions generally. This was not worthwhile without a good supply of water fit for human consumption. There had been plans in existence for some years to move the Homestead to another site but these had never been put into execution as there was no bore on Coniston producing good enough drinking water. In 1964 we got a bore at Borowie, 5 miles west of the old Homestead, which seemed to be quite good water to drink and for a while it was. We built a new Homestead at Borowie but in a few months time everyone started to get violent attacks of Diarrhoea, in my own case, I was the last to be affected, I thought it was a hangover from the Aileron Rodeo, but it just wouldn't go away. All hands in the camp were down sick so we carted water from the Tin Field Bore about 15 miles away for the rest of the time we occupied Borowie.

However the Camp gradually drifted back to their old camping sites at the old Homestead, which they preferred anyway, and the problem of a new Homestead was deferred till a suitable water supply could be found. There is a good supply of drinking water (soakage) at Arika Waterhole at the junction of the Crown and Lander creeks but I didn't like it as a site for a Homestead as in big floods it would be an impossible place to get into or out of.

However it proved quite easy to get the school going at Coniston. I had been principal shareholder in a Station on the Roper River, Urapunga, and a school had been established there for both white and black children. In 1967 we sold Urapunga and as the incoming tenant closed the school the teacher was out of a job. He asked me if he could open a school on one of my Centralian Stations, as there was a good wood and iron building on Coniston which, with a bit of renovation, would make a good school room I agreed. In a very short time the Coniston school was under way.



The teacher, Edward Cody, was a remarkable man in most respects and was the only man I ever met that had been to Tibet and spoken to the Dalai Lama. He had documentary evidence that this was possible, there were no hair raising adventures about it, he had spent many years in India teaching in a Missionary school in Lahar which is where the main road to Tibet starts from and is only a few miles from the Tibetan border. On holidays they made walking trips into Tibet and on one occasion got right to Lhasa. When the Dalai Llama left Lhasa under Chinese pressure and came to India he stayed in Lahar for a while, whilst there he inspected the schools and was introduced to the teachers.

He must also have done a lot of big game hunting during his years in India and had many stories that seemed tall to tell of his experiences with man eating tigers, elephants and life in the jungle. Although these stories seemed tall, if you knew the man for any length of time you would realise that the stories he told would be possible with a man of his type. He could walk 20 miles a day easily and when he was at Urupunga used to take a delight in hunting buffalo on foot, which is not done in Australia. He would get them too and they made a very welcome contribution to the meat supply at the camp.

For the first year or so the Coniston school did very well, there wasn't any great scholastic progress, but there did seem to be an improvement in general behaviour and deportment. I don't think any of them ever got beyond grade 4 but at least they attended school every day. I am sorry to say this happy state of affairs didn't last.

My first mistake was at the beginning, I didn't investigate Cody's background sufficiently. He was probably the worst case of alcoholism I have ever met and that is saying something. He is the only man I ever knew that could drink Scotch Whisky neat out of the bottle and empty a bottle in one night.

At this time some of the stock boys had cars of their own. Cody, in his thirst for grog, started getting these men to drive him in to Aileron and get him supplies of grog of various kinds and potencies. However they didn't let it rest with just a bottle for Cody but as much as they could pay for themselves. The result was that the Station work started to get behind schedule.

Unfortunately I didn't realise that things were as bad as they were until 1972 when Cody became sick and went south for medical treatment. At the time he said he wouldn't be coming back and the school was without a teacher. As it was a slack period for stock work I took over the supervision of the school until another teacher could be found.

I found that beyond being able to barely write their name, most of the kids had learned practically nothing and a lot of specimen work purported to have been done by the kids and put on the wall for show had been done by Cody himself.

It was the greatest insight into Aboriginal intellect I ever had. It seemed physically exhausting for them to think out any problem that they couldn't visualise and I came to realise that the Aboriginal had little or no power of abstract thought. Ask them what 2 and 2 made and all you would get is a blank stare but say to them you saw 2 kangaroos at the Lander and 2 kangaroos at Block Hill, how many did you see on the trip and the answer would be 4. Nevertheless I found that they were rather better at maths than literary subjects.

One of the biggest bugbears I had in running the cattle camps with all black stockmen was their inability to count. I only had one head stockman, old Johnny, who could count a mob of 300 without any difficulty, but this was rare. One man I had could only count to 20 and if you asked him how many bullocks he had in hand he would say "Oh more than 20". I remember once we were mustering a big mob of bullocks for the boneless beef buyers, I got to Coniston at daylight one morning to do the drafting and final count, I said to him at breakfast time "How many bullocks do you think you have got Sid?", he replied "Oh more than 20". After breakfast I did the count, they had more than 20 all right, there were over 400 in the mob.

After about 6 months absence I received a letter from Cody expressing a wish to return to his old job. At this point the Coniston school looked like being closed indefinitely as I hadn't time for full time supervision of the school and there was no one in sight who was likely to take the job on and so, not without misgiving, I agreed to give him another chance and the school resumed again on a proper basis. I would have done much better to have abandoned the project and have done with it.

Cody was a native of the Irish Republic and had some connection with the IRA as well as being involved with some extreme left Aboriginal organisations and was in fact just another paid "Stirrer". Agitation for Land Rights was at its peak during the middle and late 70's, the Missions and Reserves had handed over their land and stock holos bolas to the Aboriginals and these paid Stirrers were paid to give the impression that the same procedure would be followed with the Stations.

The result was that the Aboriginal stockmen took the view, why should we muster cattle for sale, there won't be any cattle left on the place when



it is given to us, and this was reinforced by plenty of bottles of wine and rum to go on with.

In September 1974 the whole Coniston Homestead was completely wrecked by a Tornado, the school building was razed to ground level and books, papers and all school equipment scattered over a wide area. I was in Alice Springs at the time the tornado struck and returned to Coniston in the ordinary course of work next day. I called in at Aileron on the way out. On getting out of the car I met 2 boys from Coniston and was greeted with the cheerful statement "Coniston finish", to clarify the matter they went on to say "a big wind blown it to another country altogether".

I proceeded to Coniston hardly knowing what to expect but on arrival I could see that for once blackfellows yarns had not been exaggerated. A scene of complete devastation met my eyes, nearly all the buildings at the old Coniston Homestead were of wood and iron construction, the only cement brick buildings were a bathroom and ablution block for the school kids. These had survived though the roof had been blown off the latter, very few sheets of iron were ever recovered from the school building, presumably they had been blown into the creek and covered by sand and rubbish when the flood came down. When I arrived Cody, on the verge of tears, was endeavouring to recover some of the school papers and equipment from the wreck, apparently without much success.

The burning question now was, how and if the school could be got into operation again. I would have been quite content to call it a day, close it up for good. Any of the parents who wanted their kids to go on with their education could send them to school in Alice Springs, either to Yirara College where they were boarded at the school or board them with my wife, as we were now living in Alice Springs, and go to Traeger Park School which was just across the Todd from our place. This was done eventually and it is a pity that it wasn't done then.

But Cody was very anxious to get it going again, but it looked an impossibility. The pastoral industry was beginning to feel the effect of tighter finance and higher interest rates, but worst of all there was a disastrous drop in cattle values in 1974. To get money to build another new school was out of the question and, as we had not followed their line, there was no hope of getting anything from the Government. Cody, who was quite a handy man with tools, after a lot of discussion with the parents and pupils as well, put it to me that if I would supply the necessary material from Station funds, they would do the work without extra pay and convert the workshop to a school.

It didn't cost the Station very much and in about 3 weeks they had the school going again, I say going but it was now quite apparent that Cody was running the school for his own ends and not necessarily in the interest of the Coniston children or the Station.

He started interfering in Station matters and even said to some people he was the Manager now. On one occasion he ordered Dalgety's Manager, who had come to inspect a mob of cattle, off the place so I decided to close the school at the end of the year. I told him if he could get the Education Department to carry it on he could do so but he would have nothing to do with the Government so the school closed for good at the end of 1976.

It was the worst failure I have ever been connected with and again it might have been a great success if alcohol hadn't been invented.

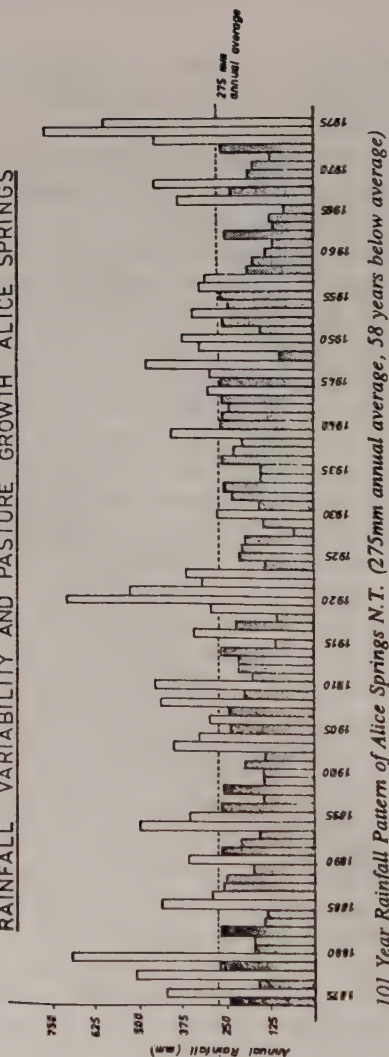
Some of the brighter pupils came in and went to Traeger Park, at one time my wife was looking after 7 at our old home in Barrett Drive, opposite where the Casino now stands. It was all right at first when I was working in Alice Springs and I could take them round to school on the way to my office, but when I was out bush for any length of time and they had to walk, they would rarely get over the Todd and would spend the day roaming around the Gap area. But such is the fate of most schemes to help the Aboriginal. They fail because of an utter lack of interest on the part of the rank and file Abos, in the case of education, there is no interest shown by either the rank and file parents or children as they can see no purpose in it. The old people think the kids would be much better employed out in the bush learning to maintain themselves on bush tucker and the kids take the simple view, "What are we going to get out of it" and invariably come up with the answer "Nothing".



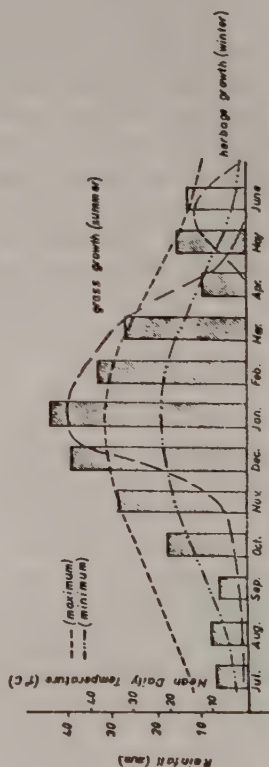
# THE 1974 FLOODS

Approximately every 50 years or so the whole of the Northern Territory and north of South Australia is deluged by floods and unusually high rainfall registrations not seen in other years. A study of the graph below is instructive and would seem to bear out the theory that peak floods only come about once in half a century.

## RAINFALL VARIABILITY AND PASTURE GROWTH ALICE SPRINGS



Seasonal conditions vary appreciably and unpredictably in the arid pastoral zone. Pasture growth is very dependent on summer rainfall and by the end of March the station manager can assess his rainfall, pasture growth and adjust his cattle numbers accordingly. Rainfall and daily temperatures are unsuitable for grass growth after March. Herbage growth in winter is inadequate as a basis of the station grazing capacity.



Animal Industry and Agriculture Branch Alice Springs March 1976

Normally rains come from the north west in Central Australia and are only surges from the north west monsoon, perhaps assisted on their way by a cyclone in the Indian Ocean. But the peak flood rains such as occurred in 1921 and 1974 appear to come from the east and north east and are the result of cyclones in the Pacific. If in any given year the north west monsoon is very active the rain depressions from these cyclones reinforce the monsoon, and rainfall records are broken all over the Northern Territory.

In the latter part of 1973 and early 1974 there were at least 3 major cyclones that crossed the Queensland coast, doing considerable damage at McKay, Townsville and even Brisbane. In the Centre there had been a steady build up from September and I remarked once to someone or other a few days before Christmas that I hadn't driven out to Coniston on a dry road for weeks. However, there had been no serious flooding and it wasn't until Australia day 1974 that the rain started in earnest. On Australia Day 1974, 34 inches were registered in 24 hours at Pine Hill, the Aileron races were to have been held on that day but had to be cancelled indefinitely. I have heard it said that if a long range forecaster wanted to make a good forecast, all he had to do was to find out the date of the Aileron Races. They never have been very fortunate in this respect but this was the first time they experienced a complete wash out.

The procedure for several years now had been for all the Station staff to spend Christmas in Alice Springs provided there was plenty of surface water and no pumps to keep going on the Station, but even this was out of date by this time as I had replaced the 16 foot Comet Mills with 20 footers and the tanks were always overflowing, it was rarely necessary to start an engine.

It was a good system mostly as it not only tended to keep drink off the Station but it gave the workers a chance to get tucker and clothes for their families before the relations and the publicans had got it ali. But in 1974 it had some rather serious consequences. There was no one at either Station and no prospect of anyone getting out for weeks. As far as the stock was concerned this didn't matter very much but the actual rainfall at Coniston during this period is unknown, it must have been between 16 and 20 inches and could have been even higher. When we eventually did get out to the Station there was 16 inches in the gauge and you could see that a lot of water had overflowed. In Alice Springs traffic was virtually at a standstill and the Eastside cut off from the rest of the Town.



In spite of my warning him by wire of the situation in the Centre Cody returned to reopen the school on the verge of the DTS and added to our difficulties considerably. Unfortunately the 1974 diary covering this period was lost so the time and dates may not be very accurate but events are very much as I can recall them from memory.

About 2 weeks after the big rain at the end of January I decided to try and get the staff and their families back to the Station. From road reports it was doubtful if it could be done, but it seemed to me that they might just as well be sitting down bogged in the bush as sitting down in Town getting into trouble. We had a Landrover which could carry a ton at a pinch and a 4 ton Austin truck so could take plenty of supplies with us, there was no shortage of water anywhere. We left Alice Springs after lunch about 2pm and it was only a couple of hours drive to the Coniston turnoff, then about a mile north of Aileron on the Stuart Highway, we camped on high hard ground. I made a brief recognisance along the Coniston road, about 2 miles, but on reaching the lower country I could see that we were going to have a pretty tough job in getting to Coniston. I returned to Aileron, taking Cody, who was obviously a very sick man, and booked a room for him advising him to stay there till we had ascertained if it was possible to get through to Coniston. He obviously wasn't in a condition to stand being bogged in the bush for no one knew how many days.

I returned to the camp at the turnoff, it was quite a memorable sight in the night with blazing fires everywhere. There were some 20 men, women and children in the party and the kids were having the time of their lives playing in the water and digging for tit bits of bush tucker in the soft ground. A chorus of frogs from a nearby swamp, including hoots from the singing frog that makes a hoot, hoot, hoot, sort of cry and is only heard after big rains - they seemed to be everywhere. I have never seen one of these creatures, some of the blacks say it is a spider but whatever it is I was always glad to hear them, it meant a good season was on its way.

We were on our way by the time it started to warm up next day and for the first few miles made reasonable progress. The Landrover went in the lead (I drove the Landrover with about 6 active men and about 400 feet of wire rope from the bore servicing tools) and if the heavily laden truck bogged I would back the Rover as close as I could get to the truck to fix the wire rope and pull the truck to hard ground. Alternatively, if the Rover bogged the truck could pull it back. In this way we made fair progress during the morning and by dinner time we had reached Kerosene Well and a well earned drink of tea and our last feed of fresh meat we were to have for some days.

In the hot monsoonal weather fresh meat won't keep for long but we had plenty of tinned stuff.

After passing Kerosene Well you come to a stretch of low lying swampy country, we reached this after leaving Kerosene Well and by nightfall the final result was both vehicles bogged to the axles and a huge pile of wet earth produced in our efforts to dig them out.

It was not a very cheerful outlook but no one seemed worried about it. I must say I wasn't worried about getting out eventually but what I was a bit concerned about was that I was long overdue at the Station. There was about 2 tons of groceries on the truck and the Abos were getting so much bush tucker that we were not using much off the truck and could have spent a month on the road.

In the morning, on surveying the scene, it was obvious we could never get the truck with the load on through the swamp on the original road but would have to do a shuttle service with the Rover and take the load onto harder ground, then skirt the swamp with the empty truck. This is against all rules of bush driving which say "Never go off the road in boggy conditions", but there are exceptions to all rules. These old graded roads in extra heavy rain can become miniature canals and its motor boating rather than conventional motoring trying to travel on them.

It is true to say that the road being compacted over a year or so is harder than the ground at each side, it is also true to say that the road where water is lying is safe to drive on as it is too hard for the water to penetrate. But in rains like the one just fallen deep holes are apt to wash out and are invisible to the driver in the coffee coloured water. If you go into one of these you really are in trouble and that is what happened to the Land Rover when I attempted to find a passible track along the road that hot and steamy morning. The front wheels must have been at least 3 feet below the level of the road, to get them back we first had to dam the water on the road by building banks across the road, then painfully bale the water out with a bucket. Most of the kids hopped in and baled with billy cans or even empty tins and we had the road dry in no time. But I can't help thinking what a wearisome process it would have been for a person own his own.

Once the water had been got rid of the next step was to jack the front wheels up and fill up the hole on the road as we went. It was necessary to do this with stones and pieces of dry wood, both of which mercifully there was a plentiful supply of right on the spot.



In about 3 hours we had the Rover on an even keel again and went back onto higher ground about half a mile away. I then started picking a track for the truck around the swamp, it was slow going, and for most of the day we measured our progress in feet rather than miles. At the end of the day we were half way round the swamp and were coming to higher ground.

Next morning we got onto much better going and were back again onto where the road had once been at a Gap. We were now approaching Pine Hill where 30 inches had been registered in 24 hours. I have only heard of 30 inches falling in 24 hours once before, that was at Roper Valley on the Roper River. I came through Roper Valley a month or 6 weeks after the flood, it had changed the face of the country completely and it was the same at Pine Hill. At the Gap where we now found ourselves and where the road had once been there was a chasm 20 feet deep, the flood waters must have roared along the road through the Gap like a river and the ground at the foot of the hills was like a sponge. It looked hard enough on the surface but the minute any weight was put on it oozed water and down you went. After about 4 hours of the hardest kind of work we constructed a causeway along the side of the chasm and got through the Gap with surprisingly little trouble and just as it was getting dark we camped on the bank of the Hansen at the Hansen Crossing.

The next morning we crossed the Hansen easily, it had a hard stony bottom and the flood had washed away the loose sand that could sometimes be troublesome. From the Hansen to Pine Hill we thought we would have fairly good going, but we had another think coming. There were long stretches of road still under water and it took us the rest of the day to make Pine Hill. We camped about 4 miles past the Station on a wide flat on good hard ground. From here the character of the country changes and the road passes through country of low hills that are in fact the foothills of the Gardiner Range. About a mile from where we camped you find yourself on a high ridge from which you get a fine view of Mt Thomas, the highest point of the Gardiner Range, this ridge is also a watershed and the creeks now flow north west into the Lander system, on the west of it and on the east side they flow east into the Hansen Woodford system. Between our last camp and Coniston there are 5 major Gum Creeks to cross and these were not difficult, just after a rain is the best time to cross a wide creek with deep sand, the sand is wet and it is like driving on the beach, its only where there is running water that you are apt to strike trouble.

We were only about 28 miles from Coniston but it took us the rest of the day to get there. Crossing the creeks wasn't difficult, some of them were still running quite strongly, but if the heavily loaded truck bogged

in the sand it was pulled out by the Land Rover, but the damage to the road was unbelievable in the hill country. The old road simply wasn't there and it was easier to drive on the side of the road. You could make progress this way until you struck a soft patch then you started digging and jacking again but towards evening we reached the Warburton only a quarter of a mile from the Station.

The Warburton has always been a difficult creek to cross and I could see that it was impossible to get the truck over in the remaining daylight so we loaded enough tucker and swags onto the Rover and hoped for the best. We just made it, there was still a lot of water coming down the creek but the Warburton is not a deep creek and has a very slow current and the deepest part of the crossing is right against the west bank, but we got the Rover over. Most of the women and kids simply waded across and soon had their fires going in their camping area where I left their swags and drove the Rover the last quarter mile to the Homestead.

It was a cheerless home coming, the place was completely deserted, the couple who had stayed on to look after the place had gone to Mt Allan as there was not a skerrick of tucker on the place and it was too wet and boggy to go out and get a killer for meat, but we had made it in spite of most people saying it was impossible.

The next morning after I took stock of the situation I could see that for all the good we could do for some time to come we might just as well have stayed in Alice Springs.

The country was like a sponge and it was quite out of the question to get around the Station by motor vehicle and the horses had been let go before Christmas and would be difficult to muster again. The weather was hot and humid with just a few floating clouds about, its remarkable how quickly in this sort of weather the surface of the country dries out.

In about 4 days it seemed the road would be dry enough to drive back to Aileron and pick up Cody, then the School at least would be operational. I got the Rover to Aileron without much difficulty, I inquired in the Aileron Bar for Cody, and was told that he was down in his room. I went down to pick him up, on entering the room Cody was seated on the bed drinking whisky neat out of the bottle, strangely enough he appeared perfectly sober. I told him to pack up and we would get underway which he did all right and that afternoon we got back as far as the Lander Bore, 18 miles from Coniston. I didn't fancy driving the last 18 miles in the dark as there were dangerous wash outs all along the road, or rather where the road had been, so just as the sun was setting we stopped, boiled the billy and had supper. But when we had finished supper and started to make camp for the night Cody couldn't get up



without assistance and it seemed best to chance the washouts and go onto the Station so we started off again.

It wasn't too bad, slow going but we made it to the Station by 9.30pm and got him into a comfortable bed.

The next day from what we could see of the country on the trip into Aileron, the country seemed to be drying up very quickly and the surface becoming reasonably hard again. I decided to try and get around the Station and see what had happened. All the bores on Coniston are sited in a circle around the Mt Stafford Range and can be serviced in one circular trip of about 70 miles. We got an early start and made slow but steady progress, the country on the flats was fairly dry on the surface and provided you were careful and didn't take any chances with soft looking spots you could make fairly good progress. But the most serious difficulty was crossing the Lander which you have to do twice on this trip. It was there that we lost most of the time, but managed to complete the circuit by just on sundown which, being February, would be about 7.30pm.

Straight away we ran into a problem, the girl that was doing the cooking at the time, Doreen, said to me as I entered the kitchen "You had better go and have a look at old Ted, he is lying down on the floor of the caravan and can't get up". I went over to his caravan and sure enough he was down on the floor. But that wasn't the worst part of it. I have never seen a human being shake like he was doing. It had to be seen to be believed. He was a heavy man, probably 14 stone and I couldn't lift him back onto the bed, eventually with the aid of 2 boys from the camp we got him back on his bed. He begged me to go to Aileron and get him a bottle of whisky to save his life, but I said a very definite no to this as I had given him one before leaving Aileron. Amongst the stores we had brought out from the Alice were some packets of Maggi soup powder, I put a couple of packets of this into a quart pot and warmed it up and told him to drink it, which he did. He found considerable benefit from it and the shakes subsided a bit but I don't think he got much sleep that night. A further dose of soup in the morning seemed to fix him up, his hands were still shaking but the terrible twitching all over his body seemed to be over.

The weather was still hot and humid and towards evening that day it started to rain again. Over the next 2 days a further 6 inches were registered and from then on until March there would be showers every day, giving the country no chance to dry up. All roads became impassible, stores were starting to run low and the school teacher, who was a cigarette fiend ran out of tobacco.

The Station tobacco supply ran out, the teacher became practically desperate, but a brief recognisance along any of the access roads could see that it was out of the question to get even a Land Rover, let alone a 4 ton truck to Alice Springs.

It has been said that a four wheel drive vehicle can go anywhere, this is substantially true in sandy desert conditions or wide sandy creeks but in bog they really have very little on a good conventional utility. Once wheels start slipping and digging in it simply means that you dig out 4 wheels instead of 2.

In 1939 at Glen Helen when we had big floods all through the country and the railway was out of order for 8 weeks and stores ran out at the Station we simply lived off the country until the railway was operational again. But that was 35 years ago and people had changed, the blacks didn't feel like going out hunting and everyone seemed to think someone ought to do something to look after them. The only activity possible or necessary on the Station at this time was to keep the school going but the kids wouldn't turn up if they were hungry. I had heard on the radio that there were 2 bombers from Amberley stationed in Alice Springs doing food drops for Stations isolated by floods so I got in touch with Dalgety's to arrange a food drop of about 2 tons, which they promptly did.

About 2pm the same day we heard the plane approaching from the south west, I had been instructed to see that sheets should be arranged in the form of a cross on the ground of an open flat on the west side of the Station. The bomber came in and as it flew over the Station you could see the bomb doors open with a metallic clang. It flew on down the creek for about 4 miles and some pessimists thought they had missed us, but in a few minutes we could hear it coming in from the north west right out of the sun. It was almost impossible to see it in the glare of the sun, it only looked like a thin line with 3 dots on it. They put 2 tons of stuff within a circle of 50 feet of the sheets, making 3 runs to do so.

There was very little damage done in landing the stuff, I had been instructed not to include any glass or anything of a very fragile nature, the weight was mostly in flour and sugar. It was a classic pattern of an air raid and if it had been bombs instead of bags they could have blown the Station off the map. We had one further drop before the roads were open again and the bombers returned to their base at Amberley.

Showers and storms continued till the end of June and the country didn't really get a chance to dry out, it was evident that the cattle had split up into small mobs and it would be difficult to get them together again.



But the growth of both ground feed and regenerated Mulga was remarkable. By this time we had managed to get enough horses in hand to form a mustering camp but things were not the same.

By this time the dole had come in and some of the men had drifted back to Alice Springs and didn't feel like returning, their argument was "Why come back to work when we can get sitdown money for just sitting down". We eventually got things moving again on the stock side only to come up against another snag. Owing to over production in the Export trade, which was supposed to be such a Godsend to the cattle producer, the price of cattle dropped to below the cost of production and from this point conditions started to go down hill.



*Ti Tree Store (Bill Hess) - early 1940.*



*Ti Tree Well, early 1940's, Willowra Camels.*

## THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1974 FLOODS

The rains of 1974 were of a character not seen in Central Australia before, even by the oldest Aborigines, and the effects of them both as regards flora and fauna as well as economic are still being felt today in 1990. They seemed to have changed the character of the country completely. I always thought that it took a million years at least for there to be any noticeable change in the climate of any given area, but now it would appear that between 1966, when the last big drought broke, there had been a considerable change in the climate and the tropical front had moved south about 600 miles. The growth of vegetation of all kinds was something that had to be seen to be believed and made utter nonsense of the Greenies plaintive cries that the country had been made a dust bowl and ruined through overstocking.

The problem now seemed to be to get enough stock to eat it off so you could have some chance of finding them in the scrub. In the late 1950's and until the early middle 60's, it was commonly thought that the Mulga was doomed to extinction and there were all sorts of obstructive regulations about cutting it for starving stock. It was thought that if young plants ever appeared they were eaten off by stock so if the country was stocked the Mulga was doomed to extinction. But how wrong theoretical men and women can be was soon apparent.

After the big rains in 1966 young Mulga plants appeared everywhere and by 1974 these had grown to sizeable trees, probably about 6 feet was the average. After the deluge of 1974 these shot up like rockets and by 1976 were full grown trees. The widgey bush, which can attain full growth in 12 months, grew up forming an undergrowth making what had been described as open woodlands a dense jungle, difficult to ride a horse through. It made mustering cattle extremely difficult and in addition to these disabilities there was water everywhere. Springs opened up where even the oldest blackfellows had never heard of there being water.

When cattle are watering on one bore or waterhole that is the only water for miles, they are not difficult to muster, 3 days around each water will usually suffice to get everything mustered on that particular water. But when the whole Station is covered in waterholes every few miles, cattle tend to split up into small mobs and may be watering anywhere.

It is a long and difficult task to get them together again and economically there was little incentive to overcome these new difficulties of mustering as the market value wasn't equal to the extra costs involved.



It may be said that 1974 was the last year of the old Pastoral days, from then on a completely new style of stock work was to emerge.



*Coniston Station 1930's.*



*A break-down, near Coniston, 1903's.*

## THE INTRODUCTION OF BUFFEL GRASS

There had been Buffel grass in the Centre ever since the first camels came in from India. The Afghan drivers insisted on using the straw to stuff their pack saddles and imported it from India for this purpose. If you went to any of the old Stations that were worked during the period of camel transport and went to any likely spot where the Afghans would lay their camels down on arrival at the Station and camp for a few days, you would be sure to see some Buffel grass. However, it would never spread away from this spot, in spite of being a very prolific seed producer.

In 1960 and 1961 the Agricultural Department imported several different strains from India and spread the seed as well as they could through the country. From 1961 to 1974 is 13 years and in this period there was no noticeable increase in Buffel grass. But after the big rains of 1974 it started to show up everywhere and by 1976 it had become the predominant type of vegetation in many places.

In 1961 the Agricultural Department had planted some on a well grassed flat on Glen Helen, planting it in furrows, between 1961 and 1974 a few plants had shown up along the furrows but that was all. After 1974 it not only germinated all along the original furrows but in about 2 years had spread over most of Glen Helen. On the Finke there had always been a small patch of Buffel at the old Station, now the Glen Helen Tourist Lodge. I had been trying for years to get this to establish on other parts of the Station getting the women from the camp to collect seeds in bags, they are experts in this, and planting it in likely places on the Station where feed was scarce but with absolutely no success. It just didn't seem to grow anywhere but on the original patch which originated in the camel days.

After the 1974 floods it spread away from this patch to areas both up and down the Finke which seems to show that its not so much the amount of rain that will germinate this seed but the general climatic conditions. During the late 70's the Centre could be described as having a tropical climate.

The actual value of establishing this grass in the Centre has proved debatable. The best that can be said about it is its quick response after even a few points of rain, in a couple of days there will be a green shoot.

But in spite of its attractive appearance it has poor food value and is unpalatable to cattle, though horses seem to like it and do well on it. Probably the best that can be said of it on the credit side is that in extreme drought conditions it is better than nothing. On the debit side



the worst that can be said of it is that where it becomes strongly established the native vegetation disappears. With its very extensive root system it seems to take everything out of the ground. The Conservationists give it their blessing as with its extensive root system it tends to keep the soil together and stops drift and erosion.

In my opinion there is hardly any real excess erosion as yet in the Centre, what newcomers take to be erosion is the normal geological weathering and not excess erosion caused by overstocking and is unavoidable.

Another notable plant to become established during this period was the ornamental Hops. This was not due to any careful plan but purely accidental and it seems to have spread out of the gardens of Alice Springs. For once an introduced garden plant ran riot without any ill affects, even some benefits. It turned the country into a blaze of colour and was some value as stock feed. The way it spread was truly remarkable and I have seen the beautiful red plants 20 miles west of Glen Helen Lodge and up the Stuart Highway as far as Ti Tree. The blaze of colour lasted for the rest of the 70's but with the drier conditions of the 80's it seemed to die out to a great extent and now in 1990 only a few plants are seen. It will be interesting to see after the next major flooding, if it appears again. It was a great tourist spectacle and was referred to as Wild Hops, it was assumed that it was a native plant but it was definitely introduced through the gardens of Alice Springs.

The economic effects of the 1974 floods were far reaching and now in 1990 they are still being felt. The pastoral industry had been praying for some sort of climatic change for years, when droughts would be a thing of the past. However in the event the pastoral industry paid a high price for this change which came about in the late 70's. This great change was not entirely due to the floods but was also influenced by events as far away as the USA and Europe.

Floods brought stockwork on the Stations to a stand still for about 6 months. Black labour had been deteriorating for 6 years and now hit the bottom with the introduction of the dole which became available in 1974. The Stations used to form the mustering camps anytime from the end of January and keep them together for the rest of the year, maintaining their families and paying a cash wage of about £2.20 a week. These conditions came to an end in 1968 when the Award came strictly into force and the cash wage, with keep, became \$37 per week, by 1974 this had increased to \$89 per week. To pay this sort of money for men to simply wait around the Station waiting for the country to dry up was out of the question, though at Coniston I did continue to maintain families of

some of the regular workers. Still many of them drifted back to Alice Springs or the Settlements and got the dole.

A further bad influence, not connected with the floods but concurrent with them, was the big drop in cattle values about this time. The result of these two factors was that the stock were not being mustered and the calves branded up and castrated. In a couple of years the whole country, not just an isolated Station, became overrun with scrub bulls and became, in many cases, too wild to muster by conventional means. Helicopter mustering was still in the experimental stages in the 1970's.

There was little incentive to muster under these difficult conditions but even if a Station is virtually closed down running expenses continue to mount up, there are bores and plant to service and the stock to keep watered and maintained. In times like 1974 and 1975 keeping stock watered was no problem, there was too much surface water.

The price of automotive fuel had a very steep rise and the cost of motor transport became almost prohibitive but there was no alternative to it now the TB and Brucellosis campaign was under way. Overdrafts started to rise to dangerous levels and interest rates and taxation both started to climb to then unprecedented heights and the outlook for the cattle game, after the best run of seasons ever known, was bleak indeed at the close of the 70's, although there were signs of a recovery in the cattle market towards the end of 1979.

About this time Land Rights became a big issue and this was the final blow to the employment of Aboriginal labour. The Missions and Settlements had handed their land and stock over to the Aboriginals holos bolus and the Aboriginals had formed the idea that the same procedure would be followed on the Stations, the attitude of workers was "why should we muster the cattle for the white man, more better we wait until we get the country for ourselves".

The story of Land Rights on Coniston is a sorry one and from what information I have on it the Aboriginals themselves were as much to blame for this as anyone. Probably no group of Aboriginal people in Australia had a better title to Land Rights than the 4 families that had lived and worked on Coniston ever since it was taken up by Randal Stafford. And herein lies the pinch, they just couldn't agree amongst themselves which family should supply the big Chief and secondly when they were eventually allotted an area, it proved to be unsuitable anyway as there was no permanent drinking water on it.

Any bores on this area, sunk either by the Station in my time or later by Water Resources on behalf of the Aborigines, were not even stock water let alone drinking water. The only other water on this block was a waterhole on the Lander which only lasted for a few months.

The Coniston people never moved onto this block. They all moved to Mt Allan and settled there, but I have heard that one of Peter Stafford's sons has since been allotted a block of land north west of the waterhole.



*Stub and Ant Bed Trough, Willowra.*



*Willowra Homestead, 1944.*



# HISTORY OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

## VOLUME 2

### THE NORTH WEST SECTOR

Central Australia can be roughly divided into four sectors, south, west, north west, the north eastern sector is usually referred to as the East Side and the south eastern sector is largely occupied by the Simpson Desert, although there are a few Stations on the fringe of the desert.

The north west sector, with which we are now dealing, could be described as the country west of the Stuart Highway, bounded on the south by the Tropic of Capricorn and on the north by the latitude of Tennant Creek and on the west by the border of Western Australia. This is a vast area of land and from a rough calculation on the pastoral map, would seem to have an area of between 55,000 and 60,000 square miles, and even by 1980 was only about 35% occupied for pastoral purposes.

About this time Willowra and Mt Allan became Aboriginal land and were followed by Mt Barkly and Ti Tree. The excision of these 4 Stations would further reduce the white pastoral occupation by about 15%. This is not intended as an argument either for or against Land Rights, but it is a sad fact that as soon as a Station, even one that has been doing well under white management, becomes Aboriginal land turn off fades and in a few years doesn't produce enough meat for the people living on it.

Before World War 2 there were only about 5 Stations in this area, there was Aileron, then Ryans Well - the Nicker family, Napperby - Harry Tilmouth and Tom Turner, Coniston - Randal Stafford and Ti Tree - Bill Heffernan. Pine Hill was taken up by Billy Moore and Harry Huddleston in the early 1900's but was occupied by Alan Spencer in the late 30's and 40's. He sold out to Tom Turner and Jack Dowler in the mid 40's.

## RYANS WELL AND THE NICKER FAMILY

In 1904 Sam Nicker and his wife decided to pull up stakes in Queensland and make for the Northern Territory. He was a professional shearer with the old blade shears and one of his reasons for leaving Queensland could have been that about this time all sheds were changing to machines, I think he was also interested in the Arltunga gold fields.

They loaded all their worldly possessions onto a Buggy with two very staunch horses and started off down the Streleke Track headed for Quorn in Southern Australia. It is not quite clear why they chose such a circuitous route, it may have been that they wanted to see some relatives living in Quorn, or it may have been that the journey directly overland was difficult and dangerous at this time, it was more suited to camel travel than a wheeled vehicle. It's a pity that people who did these epic journeys in the early days didn't keep a day to day diary of the trip. There must have been plenty of incidents on a trip like this worth recording. However, with Sam's good judgement and knowledge of the bush and horses they eventually arrived in Quorn.

Quorn is a pretty little town at the foot of the Flinders Ranges and must have seemed a very welcome resting place after the sand hills and gibber flats of the Streleke. They stayed for a while in Quorn where their eldest son was born, renewing acquaintances with their relatives and old friends and giving their splendid horses a very well earned rest. They then started north again, now heading straight for Alice Springs and Arltunga.

They arrived at Arltunga only to find that the heyday of the gold fields was over and the gold had mostly petered out, that is to say the accessible gold. It was said there was enough gold in the White Range at Arltunga to pay off the National Debt but it was too fine and in such difficult matrix that it wouldn't pay to try and recover it by any process known at the time. At this time gold was worth approx £5 an ounce, but today with gold worth between \$350 and \$500 an ounce it still doesn't seem a viable proposition.

In 1904 Arltunga was the principal town of the Centre, Alice Springs was only a Telegraph Station occupied by the telegraphists, linesman, blacksmith and handyman, but it acted as a depot for Arltunga and was its contact with the outside world. As the gold petered out and the miners started to leave their claims some, who liked the life in the Centre, decided to stay in the country and a small settlement about a mile south of the Telegraph Station sprang up and became known as Stuart.

Several families settled there and two stores started business as well as the famous old Stuart Arms Hotel. When Sam Nicker could see that the heyday of Arltunga had passed he moved into Stuart and built a house there, probably somewhere on what is Wills Terrace today, the location of the actual site has been lost. He started a carrying business and ran a Hawker's van up the road, that today is the Stuart Highway, as far as Newcastle Waters servicing the Telegraph Stations and drovers coming south.

The Nickers made perhaps a bit better than a comfortable living out of these projects and by 1914 decided to go into the Pastoral industry, taking up a lease of the country around the Government well known as Ryans Well. At one time there had been a Telegraph Station here, there was a stone building and a well but the water in this well is barely fit to drink and probably the Telegraph Department had improved their equipment and a repeater station was no longer necessary. (Mrs Hall nee Nicker told me that it was a Telegraph Station but after referring to an 1892 map I found it referred to as an Engineer's Depot, I could never see the purpose of a Telegraph Station here as it was too close to Alice Springs).

The Nickers bought 400 sheep, it is not clear where they got them from or by what means they were delivered to them in Alice Springs, but in August 1914 they were ready to start out to Ryans Well.

Mrs Hall (nee Nicker) says she doesn't remember much of the trip as she was only four years old at the time but says she can remember camping on the Burt Plain for a while resting the sheep for a few days. While they were there Ted Dixon passed the camp travelling with pack horses, it was August 1914 and he told them that the war had started. They pushed on north and eventually reached Ryans Well and here their journey came to an involuntary end. The wheel of their wagon turned inside out and they were without transport.

Their original intention had been to establish their permanent camp at Anna's Reservoir but eventually, after much discussion, they decided to settle at Ryans Well.

The problem at Ryans Well has always been good drinking water, a Government well had been sunk there equipped with the old fashioned horse whip for the Engineering (Well Party) staff and travellers along the line. There was also a good stone building, both the well and the building still stand today but of course they are not operational.



By 1914 the family had increased to four, three boys and a girl Margaret, who today in 1991 is the only surviving member of the family and lives at the Old Timers.

The boys have all been dead for some years now, Ben was killed in the evacuation of Greece in 1942. As well as doing stock work on their own Station, Claude and Eugene took jobs on other Stations, mostly with the Hayes on Maryvale and Undoolya.

The three last children were born in Alice Springs without qualified medical aid. Mrs Hall tells me that, when she was born at the old Government Well, she was looked after by a Mrs Hooper, in those days the women had to help one another, there was no qualified Doctor or Nurses in the Centre in 1914 and there are grim stories of operations being performed on the floor of the Telegraph Station, the Postmaster acting as surgeon, with a telegraphist at the key taking instructions in morse from a Doctor in the Adelaide GPO. Ironically on the site of the old Government Well now stands the modern Alice Springs Hospital with its well equipped Maternity Ward.

Sheep have never been very successful in the Centre financially, and although they started with 400 sheep this number never increased but remained static for years. I found the same thing when I had sheep at Glen Helen, it is due to the high mortality of lambs, unless you have winter rain and have green feed all the cold weather the ewes can't produce enough milk to raise their lambs and hardly any survive into the following year. It is rare to get a winter rain in the Centre and secondly the sheep have to be shepherded, and aboriginal shepherds are not always reliable.

The Nickers concentrated more on selling meat than on selling wool, Mrs Hall tells me that the highest price they ever got for their wool was a shilling a pound but she doesn't remember what the lowest was. The meat sales proved very profitable, travellers passing Ryans Well could always get mutton there, which was a welcome change after nothing but beef for perhaps months. There was plenty of goat meat to be had but most men didn't like it, though I could never tell the difference myself.

The years slipped away in their usual remorseless fashion and probably about 1918 they decided to try cattle. After the war the price of both sheep and cattle went sky high, both commodities had been controlled during the war. Cattle were making particularly good money for those days but in 1921 there was a dramatic fall in cattle values, Australia had the contract to supply the Belgium Army, it ran out in 1921 and the Belgium Government wouldn't renew it. It was absolutely disastrous to the cattle industry all over Australia.

Mrs Hall tells me that on several occasions they had to send money after the cattle and quotes prices as low as £2.10 shillings a head for bullocks.

This was not entirely due to the low level of the cattle market but to some extent to the long walk to Oodnadatta, some 400 miles. All Stations in this area found that on arrival in Adelaide their cattle would be of store value only, these cattle would be bought up by the Kidman interests for a song, turned onto fattening country for 6 months and then resold for perhaps four times the money they had made for the producer.

The Nickers made a comfortable living out of Ryans Well, without the assistance of the Banks or Stock Agents and above all the Government, indeed there was no source of outside finance available to these early pioneers. The good old firm of Wallis Fogarty & Co would provide limited finance for Station running expenses and for the family to live on, it was beyond the resources of Wallis Fogarty to provide money for full scale development of the Stations.

The Manager of Fogartys at the time was George Wilkinson and he has been called the father of Central Australia. George was a keen businessman but he always balanced the interests of his Company with the welfare of the people living in the country and he helped many a battler out of his difficulties and enabled them to stay on their Stations. Some thought of him as a very hard man but these were mostly of the no-hoper type.

The people of today that live in conditions that have all mod cons have a lot to thank these early pioneers for. They laid the foundations that made this possible. In 1914 there was considerable settlement adjacent to Arltunga and in 1914 with the start of World War 1, the wolfram fields at Hatches Creek and Wauchope were opened up bringing a considerable number of people into the country to the east. However, along the telegraph line and to the west of it there was a gap of some 400 miles of unoccupied country between Ryans Well and Banka Banka, 60 miles north of Tennant Creek which was then only a lonely Telegraph Station occupied only by the Operator and Linesman. If it hadn't been for the efforts of these early pioneers, all this area today would almost certainly been aboriginal land.

By 1927 not only Ryans Well but all the Centre was approaching some very hard and difficult times. The seasons that had been exceptionally good following the record rains of 1921 and 1922 had started to taper off as they always do and by 1927 the whole country was in the grip of extreme drought.

An additional misfortune hit Ryans Well, Sam Nicker had a stroke and in 1928 and passed away, leaving the Station to his wife. As the drought worsened she decided to sell out and live in Alice Springs and about 1929 she found a buyer in Norrie Claxton.

Claxton was a man who new everything but everything didn't include running a Station. He abandoned the old place at Ryans Well and built a new homestead about 5 miles along the Telegraph line, at the same time he changed the name of the Station to Aileron, by which name it is known today. I have been told that there was a good spring of drinking water there and this was Claxton's reason for moving but they found that there wasn't enough water to supply all the needs of the house. Claxton thought he might improve the supply by putting a stick of gelignite into it. This is always a silly thing to do as it fractures the strata and allows the water to escape to lower levels. The upshot of it was that Claxton found himself without any water at all.

He used to camp in a caravan anywhere he could find enough water to live on but after a few years he gave it away and sold the Station to Fred Colson and it remains in the hands of the Colson family today. However water is still a problem for them, in spite of deep boring rigs some of their best country is still without water.

About 1925 Bill Braitling started Mt. Doreen and about the same time Jimmy Wickham started Willowra on the lower reaches of the Lander. Nugget Morton took up Anningie and a Mr Campbell, a retired Stock Inspector, took up Mt Peake. Some time in the 1930's, Charlie Carter took up Mt Esther as a sheep Station. But sheep are not intended for the Centre and while the Centre produces an excellent type of wool, sheep never seem to reproduce readily here and even if you get 80 to 100% of lambs few survive the dry winters. If there is green feed all through the winter and the ewes have plenty of milk you may get a good survival rate but this doesn't often happen. Charlie Carter died and the place was run by his halfcaste sons for a while but was eventually taken over by Tony Chisholm and run in conjunction with his Anningie Station.

After the war Mt Denison and Mt Allan were created out of land resumed from Coniston and Napperby. The method the Land Court had in those days of allotting a new lease was more like Tattersall's Sweep than the considered decisions of a Court of Law. It worked like this; anyone could make an application and all the Court had to do was to decide that the applicants had some chance of running it and that some Stock Agent was prepared to back them.



Several of the most suitable applicants were selected to draw lots for the blocks offering, this was supposed to ensure that the Big Boys of the pastoral industry didn't get all the best blocks, but it didn't work that way. After about a year and a lot of hard work, the original Lessee would find he hadn't the means to carry on, some kind hearted private financier would make him a loan and usually end up owning the Station, some of which today are in the millions bracket.

Mt Denison was allotted by ballot to Leo Murphy but Murphy was obliged to bring in a partner who eventually took over the Station, but in this case Murphy was treated very well as the partner. The Martins started him on Idracowra Station and this has proved over about 40 years to be one of the most successful Stations in the country. Mt Denison has done equally well, so in this one case everyone is happy.

Mt Allan is a similar story, it was originally allotted to Bob Gregory. Bob was a hard worker and had been born in the N.T. but he hadn't the means to develop a place like Mt Allan. Mt Allan has always been known as a hard place to get water, it lies in a belt of granite country which extends through Napperby and Pine Hill to Aileron on the Stuart Highway. There just doesn't seem to be any underground supplies of water in this belt of country. Bob Gregory formed a partnership with D D Smith but as he was unable to contribute any capital to the partnership he was obliged to retire from it. He left the country and took up a farm somewhere in Victoria, but returned to the Territory in the late 50's or early 60's. About the end of 1976 the Smiths sold Mt Allan to the Aborigines and it became Aboriginal land.

In 1947 Bill Waudby took over Mt Wedge and after years of battling with adverse seasonal conditions and sheer bad luck, still holds the country today, in fact they have added to it. For years Bill Waudby was dogged by sheer bad luck, his wife contracted Polio and became a helpless cripple, confined to a wheel chair; the Homestead was completely destroyed by fire in 1961, and the story of the Broken Tank would make one wonder if he wasn't living under some sort of curse.

The broken tank is just outside the beautiful Kienarrie Gorge and when I was out in that country in 1961 was just a heap of twisted metal. Bill told me the story, it was a 25,000 gallon squatters tank with an iron bottom, Bill had assembled the tank and was ready to fill but before the engine could be started, a whirlie wind came and lifted it holos bolas off the tank stand and turned it upside down. A complete wreck of twisted steel, but the story doesn't finish there. Some years later he told me that he had salvaged some of the steel and straightened it out and eventually got enough to make a smaller tank which he was going to use at the new

Homestead. He had it assembled and exactly the same thing happened, a whirlie wind wrecked it a second time before it could be filled. You may say "You wouldn't read about it" but you just have. But one wouldn't have to be ultra superstitious to say the tank anyway was cursed. But old Bill carried on through all these vastitudes carried along by an irrepressible sense of humour.

In 1962 he joined forces with Bill Wilson in opening a stock route to Wilson's Billiluna Station over the Western Australian border. This meant cutting a track from somewhere about Mt Doreen north west through the western Tanami desert over the W.A. border to Billiluna via the Balgo Hills Mission. It was a big project to undertake and a chancy one. There were, if I remember right, 5 men in the party, Bill Waudby and Bill Wilson but I don't know who the other 3 were and 2 diesel Landrovers. Bill Waudby had been a navigator in the R.A.A.F. during the war and they were relying on him to guide them through once they left the beaten tracks. They got through to Billiluna without incident and on return surveyed a possible route for cattle. Wilson put down a couple of bores, and the following year brought a mob of cattle through.

The story of the first mob was marked by a tragic comic incident when, as the cattle were approaching the Balgo Mission after about 3 days without a drink, the black boys, some of whom belonged to the Mission, left the white drover in charge on his own with the cattle that had already smelt the water at the Mission. The result was that the mob of thirsty cattle rushed the Mission and simply took charge of any points they thought they could get a drink and did considerable damage. One account says that 3 bullocks got into the church and drank all the Father's Holy Water, I suppose it would have been possible but more likely to be just a yarn to add colour to the incident.

One result of these activities was the establishment of a new Station, Mongrel Downs, the walk across was too far so Wilson took up this lease as a staging camp and would spell the cattle for 6 months or so before offering them for sale. This was of course when cattle were moved on the hoof and it wasn't until the 70's that motor transport started operating on this route. Many people wonder why a name like Mongrel Downs should have been adopted.

The story is that Bill Wilson, who was a very heavy drinker, had ordered a consignment of whisky from Alice Springs by the mail plane. The pilot, knowing Mongrel Downs was desperately short of tucker and the plane already overloaded, thought he would be doing the right thing by taking on as much food stuff as his load limit would permit, left the case of whisky for the next trip.



*October 1952 Mt Wedge Bore.  
Broken 25,000 gallon tank with 5" of water, destroyed by Tornado like winds.*



*Central Mt Wedge Homestead, January 1961.  
Destroyed by fire caused by kerosine fridge.*



On the planes arrival Wilson was infuriated and all through the day was saying "That Mongrel of a pilot" and one way or another the name stuck and the Station became Mongrel Downs.

To return to Mt Wedge and the Waudbys, it is managed today by Bob Waudby, a son of Bill's, on highly scientific lines and a few days ago I heard a very interesting and instructive talk by Bob on the ABC.

Sometime about 1959 the Coppock family sold their Gilbeenie Station, east of the Stuart Highway, to Jack Dowler of Pine Hill.

They had been running sheep on Gilbeenie, but it was poor country, mostly spinifex which is unsuitable for sheep. They took up two leases west of Mt Wedge, New Haven and Gurner. This country west of the Sidley Range, and in fact the whole of the so called Tanami Desert has always been underrated in my opinion. Up till about 1960 very little was known of it off the road to the Granites and Tanami, very few rainfall records existed of the area as a whole.

The Lands Department has never encouraged white development on account of the Aboriginal situation, but I wouldn't be surprised if this so called desert didn't contain some of the best pastoral land in the Territory.

The Coppocks carried on at New Haven and Gurner with limited success. At first they had brought their sheep from Gilbeenie and although the country was good sheep country there were other problems, the country was swarming with dingos and water was limited and, as a crowning misfortune, Bert Coppock died after they had been at New Haven only about 18 months. However, he had two very capable sons who carried New Haven on through very difficult times.

In 1961 I moved the small flock of sheep I had on Glen Helen to Coniston on account of the extreme drought conditions existing there and I bought all their sheep and added them to the Glen Helen flock. When I inspected the sheep with a view to purchase I was impressed with the country and later agisted 1,600 Glen Helen cattle in the area at Yulabra Soak by the good offices of Bill Waudby. In early 1962 the drought broke with torrential rains, by June 1962 when we took the last lot back to Glen Helen I sent the bullocks on to Adelaide and they topped the market.

Launce Coppock, who took up Gurner, never did any good with it and attached it to New Haven. Launce was never interested in stock and was essentially a Town man.



*Floods at Mt Wedge, February 1982.*



*Mt Wedge Homestead*

He operated a boring plant for some years and was probably one of the best drillers operating in the Centre, any of his holes I ever looked down were perfectly straight, which I regret to say is unusual speaking generally. He was a brilliant mechanic and in later years carried on a business in Alice Springs. I read in the paper that he had sold up his interests in Alice Springs and gone to live down south. Alec Coppock married Rosemary Rawlins and they succeeded in getting finance to stock their country with cattle and carry New Haven on today.

There is very little other development in the north west sector, Sam Griffiths took up a lease, Chilla Well, and Tom Rawlins occupied a lease Kingooram on the Woodford for some years but it now seems to be abandoned. I don't think Chilla Well was ever stocked, though Bill Wilson used to find it handy to rest cattle coming from Billiluna. This about covers the pastoral development in the north west sector up to the 1980's.

Unlike the south west sector, the north west has absolutely nothing to offer tourism, and this makes pastoral tenure much more secure, the pastoralist isn't being plagued from time to time to make excisions for National Parks etc.

There always has however been a lot of mining activity of the gouger type in the area, but this has caused little interference with the Stations. Small deposits of almost all kinds of mineral have been found but no significant discovery has been made. On Anningie a promising deposit of tin was found by Ben Nicker, who also found an even better tin deposit on Coniston. This was in the 1930's when Malaya supplied the whole world with tin and neither the Anningie tin or the Coniston show were big enough to interest the big companies, even during the war when the Malayan tin was lost to the Western Allies due to Japanese occupation.

BHP did an extensive survey of both fields, the report was that if the ore had been 1 per cent better it could have been worked at a profit. Fred Davis, a prospector of the old type who travelled with camels, discovered what looked like a very rich copper show on the Lander Creek, about 20 miles from Coniston Station in a south easterly direction. This was in the 1930's.

Davis tried for years to interest the big companies in this show but without success until, in 1948, the Zinc Corporation took an option and did extensive diamond drilling on the site. But after about 6 months exploration turned it down as the diamond drilling showed that the mineralised belt didn't go below 50 feet.





*Floods at Mt Wedge, 1982.*

The ore was extremely complex and expensive to treat, as well as copper it contained a small percentage of gold, zinc and some other minerals that were very hard to get rid of and the ore had to be shipped to Pt Kembla for treatment. It was packed into 44 gallon drums and moved by motor transport to Alice Springs, thence by rail to Pt Adelaide and by sea to Pt Kembla. After the Zinc Corporation turned it down Ray Brummel took it up and worked it for a couple of years. Ray was an unusually hard worker and had his own carrier business, but he only showed indifferent results.

Gold was discovered not far from this site by Norman Crowder of Tennant Creek during the war, but it never came to anything. Today there is still an 80 foot shaft to show that a lot of hard work and high hopes had gone into it.

During the Korean War, wolfram was worked at Brooke's Soak by Aborigines mostly. I only heard of one white man being involved, it is an extremely hard field to work in a granite formation. Quite a lot of wolfram was produced and as war or rumours of wars always cause the price of wolfram to rise, they made quite a lot of money, but it had petered out to nothing by the time the war was over.

About 6 miles south of Brooke's Soak is the tantalite show. In 1946 Randal Stafford formed a small Company to work this show. Tantalite was in very keen demand at this time, it is used in the manufacture of the jet engines on account of its very high melting point.

However the Company failed just as it was going into operation as it was discovered that the black sands on some beaches in, I think, New Zealand contained a very high percentage of tantalite and were much easier to work than a show in hard granite country.

Mining men are not noted for high principles and Stafford was too old to take an active part in the management and appointed an experienced mining man to take charge of the Company. I don't think they ever produced more than a bag of tantalite and as soon as the funds supplied by Stafford were used up the show closed down and has never been reopened. Randal Stafford lost a lot of money over it, it must be admitted that the Manager had some excuse in that there was no reasonable supply of water, and water had to be carted about six miles, the recovery of this ore demands large quantities of water.



*New Haven Homestead 1960, nestled between two bloodwood trees.*



*Sheep and Goats, New Haven 1960.*





*The Granites - an early view.*



*The Hon. John Gardner's vehicle.*

## THE GRANITES AND TANAMI

The only significant mineral deposits known to exist in the North West Sector are wolfram at Mt Hardy and gold at the Granites and Tanami. The wolfram at Mt Hardy was worked for some years off and on by Ly Underdown with crude equipment and never showed any spectacular results.

In the late 1920's the Chapmans, Old Pop as he was known, and his son Gordon endeavoured to open up the Granites goldfield. Gold had been known to exist in this area since 1900 when that great explorer and prospector Davidson discovered gold at Tennant Creek and pushed on west to discover the Tanami and Granites fields. It may be said of Davidson that, on this memorable trip, he discovered all the worthwhile mineral deposits in the country. However, most of them were only suitable for big companies to work and with the equipment and know how of the day were simply not viable.

Both the Granites and Tanami were worked spasmodically in the early 1900's but their formation was too hard to work with the equipment of the day and lacked reasonable water supply. Interest in them lapsed until about 1928 when old Pop Chapman and his son Gordon attempted to open up the Granites and took up extensive prospecting areas at The Granites. Some how exaggerated accounts of the gold being recovered got around the capital cities and a gold rush on the lines of California or the Yukon set in.

I don't know how many men actually made the Granites but it was far beyond the available supplies of food and water, particularly water. Most of the miners had been led to believe it was an alluvial field but there were only a few small patches of alluvial there and these had been pegged by the Chapmans. But once miners think they know where the end of the rainbow is they will make for this locality and only death will stop them. They came for all over Australia, all sorts and conditions of men, very few were bushmen. They came in all types of vehicles, most of which would be classed as unroadworthy today and put off the road. Some even thought they could walk there and the numbers of these built up in Alice Springs where the Police did their best to see that they didn't leave the town on foot.

It was during this time that Joe Kilgariff did a stirring job with his amateur radio station. Joe, besides being licensee of the Stuart Arms, was a ham radio man who had an amateur transmitting licence. They are a world wide association and communicate with one another all over the world and have done good work in all sorts of emergencies when other

conventional types of communications have failed, earthquakes, cyclones, floods and bushfires. They have kept communications open when the ordinary Post and Telegraph have failed.

Joe with his amateur station sent and received wires from anxious relations as well as big business negotiating claims on the goldfields, and eventually sent the telegrams that led to the Stock Exchange sending Dr Madigan, Professor of Geology at the Adelaide University, to inspect the field and ascertain its true value. Madigan spent about a week at the Granites and returned to Adelaide with an adverse report. He said that there was no alluvial gold at the Granites and the field could only be worked by a big company, even then success was doubtful as it was very difficult country to work and no sufficient supply of water in sight.

Now the bubble burst and the rush was over and many hopefuls who had rushed into the Granites were now just as keen to rush out again. Although many of them had dreamt of returning millionaires a lot of them had to get assistance from the Government to return home. The worst obstacle on the road to the Granites is the Crown Creek crossing, 5 miles west of Coniston Station. Here the Crown Creek has 3 channels and covers an overall distance of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile and the sand in the channels is deep and very heavy going even for today's four wheel drive vehicles, which at the time of the Granites rush was still about 10 years away. At the height of the rush there were times when there would be so many cars stuck in the crossing that arrangements had to be made with Mr Stafford of Coniston to pull them out with his camels and clear the road for traffic.

The Chapmans were not very popular and were lucky not to have been beaten-up, or worse. Whoever was responsible for the first misleading reports which lead to the rush, it was the Chapmans that were blamed for everything. The Chapmans however, were determined to develop the field and carried on working the field on tribute and at the same time endeavouring to interest some large company in it. At least 2 companies took options on it, an English company, I forget the name, and Mt Isa Mines (M.I.M.), but neither exercised their options.

The Chapmans were bitterly disappointed at the failure of Mt Isa to take up their option and didn't do much further work on it.

In those days such things as Land Rights, Impact on the Environment and Conservation were never heard of but with the end of the second World War and the growing influence of the United Nations Land Rights started to take on a new meaning.





*On the Burdekin duck.*

In this North West Sector it became very hard to get any form of lease on the land, either mining or pastoral.

Within the last 3 years the North Flinders Mining Company has achieved agreement with the Traditional Owners with surprisingly little opposition from them and have commenced operations at Tanami with very encouraging results. Their report up to June 30th 1990 showed a profit of \$18 million and they say they can treat a million tons of ore per year for several years to come. This is due to the rapid development of mining technology and I sometimes think that the several earthquakes they have had in the Tennant Creek district are probably due to Old Pop turning in his grave.

Today Tragedy track is known as "The Beef Road", it has been re-routed and upgraded considerably and some 100 miles of it has been sealed and from there a graded road goes right through to Halls Creek in W.A.. But it is still a trip not to be undertaken lightly.

Some of the more experienced men stayed in the country held by the miner's dream of finding gold at the bottom of the rainbow, but none were successful

They were a tough crowd, one of the most interesting was the Hon John Gardiner, a remittance man from England, who roamed the country in an old Chev 4 utility. One of the front wheels had an inclination from true of about 10 degrees out of line but it didn't seem to interfere with its performance. Jack could drive this extraordinary vehicle over the Warburton crossing at Coniston Station without the slightest difficulty. I had one of the latest Chev 6 utes and would always get stuck at least twice when negotiating this very difficult crossing - it may have been the ratio of weight to power that gave the old Chev 4 the edge. The Hon John stayed in the district until the middle 50's when he went to the Top End, there he successfully prospected some of the uranium mines and made a lot of money, he had struck it rich.

I met him on the road one day after he returned from the Top End, he was driving a brand new Holden and wanted me to join him in a trip to Cambodia, but I had to decline with regret. Such trips are not for pastoralists. He did the trip and believe it or not returned still a wealthy man.

There were quite a few of these desert rat prospectors that made their home in the Lander - Tanami desert area.





*Law's wireless plant, The Granites.*



*Dick Billington "dollying" at the Granites.*





*Boring for water - The Granites.*

Besides Gardiner there was Alf Lawrence, Bart Williams, George Purchase, Ted McCormack and a man named Mitchell, I can't recall his christian name, he perished attempting to walk from Mt Doreen to Alice Springs.

Ted McCormack married one of the Coniston girls, Eileen Nabarula, and lived there working off and on until he died in 1964.

He was an uncontrollable alcoholic and a compulsive gambler. He died with £11 in his pocket in a taxi on the way to the hospital during a Christmas booze-up in Alice Springs. He was a good windmill erector but if there was any grog about too unreliable for any other type of work.

Alf Lawrence gave up prospecting for a time and bought a cattle truck when road transport of cattle first started and continued in this and general carrying for a good many years. He sold out in the early 70's and went back to prospecting. In the late 40's and 50's these desert rats would seldom take a regular job on a Station, they were an extremely independent crowd but in an emergency were always ready to offer assistance pumping or repairing yards etc, none of them were stockmen.

A glance at the pastoral map and a rough calculation will show that over half the north west sector is Government Reserves, the Haasts Bluff and Lake McKay Aboriginal Reserves and the Wild Life Sanctuary, and it would appear that the Administration is loathe to grant any further pastoral or mining leases on the remainder, on account of Aboriginal policy. As yet the oil companies have shown little interest in this area.

While I don't know the north west sector very well it has always seemed to me that the term Tanami desert was only applicable in that there was little or no surface water available and early travellers to the Granites and Tanami took their lives in their hands on the old Tragedy Track.

Until recently no reliable rainfall records were available and even now in the desert area there wouldn't be more than 4 weather stations sending in regular reports. However, from these reports and from my own observations in 1961 and 1962 and from time to time reports from travellers in this area, I have drawn the conclusion that the rainfall in this area could be higher than that nearer the ranges and actually could be good pastoral country once permanent water supplies were provided. The only visible resources of the north west sector are pastoral, it has nothing to offer tourism, the oil companies have shown little interest in it and North Flinders Mining are the only mining company operating in the area.



*Ti Tree Station, 1936.*



## SOCIAL LIFE IN THE NORTH WEST SECTOR

The social life differed considerably from the social life in the south west, firstly they were a different and more diverse type of people and secondly, owing to the longer distances they had to travel to make contact, had fewer opportunities for social activities. Napperby was occupied by a family from N.S.W. and became a holiday resort for all the leading socialites from Sydney and Melbourne and few of the other neighbours joined in at Napperby. Mt Wedge, Mt Allan, Mt Denison and Mt Doreen formed the main social group and would stage parties at their Stations in turn. It was a good idea and tended to create a better atmosphere even though they suspected each other of pinching each others calves.

The families that occupied Willowra and Ti Tree were deeply religious but unfortunately of different denominations and didn't mix in with anyone very much, but at Ti Tree anyway all comers were welcome. Jack Dowler on Pine Hill, not being a family man, was also isolated socially, while I never became identified with any of these groups I was always very welcome at any of them. I may say however that my calls were mostly on business matters, I never have been a heavy drinker and have always made it my policy never to drink on the Station and there was some very heavy drinking at these Station parties.

But there were 2 events of the year when everyone joined in and forgot about work for 3 days, first the Aileron Races and later the Rodeo. Both events became very popular and people would come from as far as Mt Isa and Camooweal, which tended to spoil it somewhat for the locals. As race day dawned there would be scenes of intense excitement on the Stations and getting everyone away to the races would be a good exercise in logistics for a budding General.

The motorcade from Coniston would usually consist of the Station utility carrying a select few, the Station truck with the families from the camp, men women and kids. In those days when tribal law was still strong, and it was particularly strong at Coniston, getting everyone seated was like an usher at the theatre getting everyone a suitable seat. Certain men must not sit alongside certain women, a breach of this could cause murder in those days, and it was invariably an hours job getting everyone in their right position - it was usually effected to the accompaniment of endless dog fights and just as everything was settled some of them would jump off to rescue their dog if he was getting the worst of it, the procedure would then be repeated.



*Mining at the Granites in 1991 - "Bunkers Hill".*



*"The Shoe" Open Cut Pit - Granites 1991.*

The Landrover would carry single men who were not allowed to come near women at all, but eventually everything would be in order and away we went to the accompaniment of a canine chorus of howls from the dogs that had been left behind. Arriving at Aileron the first thing to do would be to pick a camp site. None of the locals ever thought of staying at the Hotel, that was invariably full to capacity with visitors from interstate, and anyway most of us preferred to camp.

The morning was usually spent in the Bar and in the afternoon those who could still walk went to the races, it would usually be a Saturday afternoon. Next day, being Sunday would be sports, foot races, high jump etc, in which both black and white took part, and on Monday horse races again. The horse races were practically 100% white but there was a stockboys' race for the blacks to finish up with. It was said that this race was the best to bet on as every horse entered would be out to win.

I usually returned to the Station on Saturday night, checked the bores on Sunday and went back to Aileron on Monday in time for the first race, getting everybody back to the Station on Tuesday - a process even more chaotic than getting in from the Station.

At this early period there were very few fights and very little visible drunkenness amongst the blacks. There were very severe penalties for white people giving blacks liquor and they were rigorously enforced. A whiteman caught giving an Aboriginal even 1 can of beer would get 6 months without the option of a fine, and in my opinion it is a pity that the law didn't stay that way. In the late 60's and all through the 70's, these pleasant old Picnic Race meetings became just an orgy of drunken blacks and they would be lucky to get through the program without someone getting killed. Eventually the Barrow Creek Race Club, who held their races at Aileron, decided to hold them in Alice Springs.

The Rodeo was first started by Jim Davies, "Old Iron Bark," when he took over the Aileron Hotel in 1960. It was even more popular than the Races and was sponsored by the Rotary Club and R M Williams. The procedure was much the same as the races, everyone camped out as the Hotel hadn't anything like the necessary accommodation to accommodate everyone attending and anyway most people preferred to camp.

Getting in from Coniston was rather easier than getting in for the Races as I supplied both steers and horses for the events and all the stockboys would usually have been in for some days. I generally went to the Rodeos and I must say I enjoyed myself but in principle I don't approve of Rodeos.



It has been said that they are an Australian institution, they are not, they are Spanish American and have done a lot towards generally Americanising the Australian Stockman who has now become a sort of ersatz American cowboy. They have changed the stockman's attire, hats and trousers now have a very American cut, but the biggest and to my idea the most undesirable change has been in saddles and riding gear.

The old Australian Stock Saddle, notably the 3 most popular makes, the Winneke, the Uhl and the Wallther and Stevenson, were both comfortable and safe to ride in. The American type saddle has a very hard seat and you are held like a vice in it, which on long rides is very tiring. It is also very heavy and is a load for a horse in itself. The Australian Stock Saddle has now become a sort of composite of the two, it is very heavy and in some cases has the saddle horn of the American Saddle built into it.

In Australian stock work the lasso has not been used to any extent outside the yard, the cattle were yarded and the calves lassoed from a bronco horse and pulled by a breastplate, the rope being attached to the breastplate low down on the horses shoulder. This gave a lower pull and didn't put so much strain on either the horse or saddle. In mustering lively cattle or running brumbies a fall is always possible and then it is not so much a problem of staying in the saddle as getting out of it before the horse falls on you. In a tight saddle this isn't always possible and even in the Australian Kneepad Saddle you could be caught, hence most stockmen doing fast work rode in Polesys.

But the Americanisation didn't stop here and the jargon of the Australian stockman became Americanised, yards became corals, our races became chutes and likewise the loading ramps also became chutes. The proceedings concluded with a Hootenanny, which is the American India equivalent to our Corroboree - I would prefer to call it the Stockman's Ball.

I could never see myself that the buckjump events were an overall test of real horsemanship. Firstly because the most difficult part of riding a bad horse is getting on to him, once there it isn't very difficult for an experienced horseman to stop there.

In buckjump riding under Rodeo rules, the horse is immobilised in a race, beg pardon, the chute, and the rider mounts his horse over the rails and can get firmly seated before the horse starts bucking. An experienced man would not have much difficulty in staying with him.

The American method of throwing a breakaway beast is by the head, the Australian method by the tail. The American style requires 2 men, 1 on each side of the beast, 1 horseman called the hazer is required to jamb the beast onto the thrower who jumps from his horse onto the neck of the beast, twists its head around and it will fall under its own weight, the beast is then secured on the ground.

The Australian style differs considerably, there are 2 different styles, both of which I have done myself. The one usually adopted is for the horseman to run the beast until he can jump off and catch it by the tail, throwing his weight from side to side till the beast turns its head, then an extra hard pull on the tail will usually bring it down hard enough to knock the wind out of it. The thrower gets hold of a hind leg and pulls it upwards, its surprisingly easy to hold even big bulls down by either method, the thrower usually carries 2 strong leather straps, bull straps, over his shoulder like an Officer's Sam Browne belt, keeping a firm hold on one hind leg, he would tie one strap onto the other leg and pull both legs together and secure. The buckles tightly securing both hind legs together and the beast couldn't possibly get up.

The American method of throwing by the head is a much more spectacular thing to watch and is much more suitable for a Rodeo but has little practical application in real stock work. It's too dangerous but as a spectacle it appeals to the public and this is one of the things that many of the old time Australian stockmen dislike about rodeos. Any form of showing off was anathema to them and any young fellow given to showing off to an audience was soon put in his place. Usually with this type, when they had to ride bad horses out bush or had to run really wild cattle or brumbies, they failed miserably and the Boss would say "Just another Blatherskite".

No story of the north west would be complete without some mention of Miss Pink.

This heroic but misguided woman established a Mission Camp at Thompsons Rock Hole in the mid 1930's, according to her to protect the unfortunate native women from the brutal miners at the Granites. Actually, though financed by the Society of Quakers, she was not a missionary in the ordinary sense but a student of Anthropology and the conventional Missionaries didn't approve of her at all - she thought the Aborigines shouldn't wear clothes and adopt white ways, even Christianity, but stick to the old beliefs. Some other Missionaries held similar views but were not as extreme as she was.

She bred up a big flock of goats at Thompsons Rockhole and was said to live mostly on goats' milk. During the war, after the Darwin air raid, it was said that all that stood between us and the Japanese was Miss Pink and a mob of goats.

However, I have no doubt if the Japs had made a landing somewhere on the north west coast and advanced as far as Thompsons Rockhole and been confronted by this redoubtable woman they would, to use the language of the day, have been defeated with heavy losses and retired to a stronger position.

When I say she was heroic but misguided, I mean that although she was afraid of nothing, she had absolutely no tact, and like many other people who wanted to help the Aboriginal she took an utterly unrealistic view of the problem and only succeeded in making bad feeling all round, with the Administration and her own missionary contemporaries. As for the Pastoralists and Miners, I think she would have cheerfully have burnt all Pastoralists to death and poisoned the miners.

But she was heroic in that for one thing she travelled the old "Tragedy Track" in an old second hand utility which today wouldn't be considered roadworthy. This journey was only undertaken by experienced bush drivers of the day with misgivings.

Jack Dowler of Pine Hill tells a story of her turning up at the Station one morning shortly after daylight, she greeted Jack with "I am not looking for help, only advice". It appeared that she was stuck in the Woodforde Crossing about 15 miles from Pine Hill Homestead, it was the middle of summer and she had the good sense to walk the 15 miles to the Station during the night. A hot day was coming up and Dowler took pity on her and drove her back to the Woodforde in a Willys Jeep, pulled her out of the creek and then mended a tire for her.



As soon as Jack had taken off the tow rope she roared away in a cloud of dust without a word of thanks and certainly no offer to pay him for his time and trouble. The latter isn't as bad as it sounds as in those early days of motoring we all considered it our duty to help stranded motorists, albeit with a view to the future when we may be in difficulties ourselves and payment was seldom asked for.

Of later years she retired to live in Alice Springs where she continued her moral crusade and her anthropological studies and became the Big Bad Wolf to the Administration and the Town in general. She started a garden at her house in which the various plants were named after the Government officials of the day. If, in the course of her negotiations with a certain official, things went well she would deluge, say Carrington, with water, if on the other hand they went badly, she wouldn't water that plant but leave it to wither and die.

It is an interesting speculation that in her native England, 200 years ago, she would probably have been burnt at the stake for witchcraft if she had done the same thing. After a couple of years the whole garden was dead.

Once settled in Alice Springs she attended every court case that affected Aborigines and became a really serious nuisance. She would openly criticise the Magistrate in court and on at least one occasion she was locked up until the rising of the court, after this she cut off all water from the Magistrate growing in her garden and he withered and died.

She wrote endless letters to the Advocate, one of the funniest was a letter in which she complained that the pilots of Connellan Airways were flying low over her house when she was changing her clothes, she certainly had a superb figure, more in keeping with a chorus girl than a Missionary. But I don't think a pilot just after take-off, with the responsibility of getting his plane into the air and possibly charged with picking up some urgent medical case in the outback, would be very interested in the short glimpse of her he would have, even if she was standing at the window.

Poor old Olive, she sought to make the country a more moral place, she only succeeded in making a lot of ill feeling with the Administration and her contemporary Missionary people without achieving anything constructive to help the Aborigines. Like so many others of her kind, despite her undoubted courage, determination and ability, she failed through not viewing her problems in the right perspective; as Chamberlain said just before Munich "It's not so much what is morally right as what is practically possible".

## WAYS AND MEANS

In the 1930's and early 40's, that is to say up to 1945 and the end of the 2nd World War, a Station owner wishing to improve his Station had two options as to the ways and means of getting the work done. He could either do the work himself with the help of the Station Blacks or he could engage one of the few itinerant contractors that roamed the country looking for this class of work. This sort of work was alleged to offer more money than ordinary stockwork.

To do the work yourself meant neglecting the stockwork, but was usually done quicker than doing it by contract, and very often it was a better job. Abos, in spite of what many think are often quite handy with tools and seem to like this class of work and in many cases achieved some surprisingly good results.

The Contractors were a very mixed lot, some were tradesmen from the City who had come into the bush like many others in the mistaken idea that it is a refuge from drink. There were a few who were genuinely interested in the country and again some thought they would find Lasseter's Reef at the bottom of a posthole. But one and all they were out to make big money and they weren't too particular how they got it.

The work let by the Stations in those days was yard building, well sinking and fencing. They were all a laborious kind of work, there were no chain saws for the yard builders, axes, adzes and crosscut saw, with crowbars and shovels to dig the portholes. The posthole digger hadn't been invented in the 1930's. The well sinkers had picks, shovels and crowbars to work with, hammer and tap rock drills and gelignite to get through the hard strata. The loose dirt and rock was laboriously pulled to the surface with a windlass in buckets. The fencers had axes and saws to cut their posts and crowbars and shovels to sink their portholes.

Posthole diggers and chain saws have now revolutionised this kind of work. Yard building was paid for at £5 a panel of six rails. Well sinking was paid for by the foot at from £3 to £6 and fencing at £25 a mile, sometimes in bad country the rate would be extended to £30. The posts had to be bored with a bit and brace, there were no power drills in the 1930's.

Most of the timber required for these jobs was dragged into position by horses or donkeys or carried in by camels. There were hardly any wheeled vehicles available and the wooden wheels on these few were

always giving trouble due to shrinkage in the hot dry climate and you really gained no advantage from using them. It wasn't until there were a few discarded trucks laying about the Alice that wheeled vehicles were used much by contractors, the old chassis made ideal vehicles for carting out bush, the wheels didn't deteriorate and the rubber tyres didn't cut into the sand. But all these things were time consuming and required a lot of men and would have been prohibitive today. You could say in those days that a project started in any one year might, with luck, be finished in the following year, some were never completed.

But nevertheless some of these old stockyards, wells and fences were still in use at the end of the 1970's, having withstood dry rot, white ants and bushfires for 50 years. There is one yard at Coniston old Homestead that was built by Fred Brooks in the 1920's, Brooks was murdered at Brooks' Soak in 1928, which I used in 1976 on the last muster I did on Coniston. It is probably still in use today. There is another old yard at Pine Hill that was still in use at the end of the 1970's, this yard was built by Jack Dowler some time in the 1930's and is famous for its receiving yards gate posts, they must be 3 feet in diameter and 6 feet out of the ground. No one could ever work out how he managed with the crude equipment of the time to stand them up.

We now come to June 1945, the war had been over for about 3 months and vast stocks of unwanted military equipment were starting to pile up in Alice Springs and most of it was suitable for use in the Pastoral or mining industries. Auction sales began in June with the big Pastoral firm of Goldsborough Mort acting as Auctioneers, Jack Builder from Goldsborough Mort's Stock Department swinging the hammer. The Contractors and the Stations now had all the equipment they wanted to carry on their business in a really efficient manner. Camels, horses and donkeys were replaced by Army trucks, but probably the greatest asset of all to the Pastoral industry was a big quantity of boring equipment.

Gorey Bros. had operated a plant all through the war but they were tied to the Government contracts for work on stock routes and roads used by the military. But with the end of the war they were released for general work. In addition to the Gorey's several other men with some experience of drilling bought up the surplus military equipment and started out as boring contractors.

Amongst these were Sandy Cole, Frank Hopkins and George Pridmore, of these Sandy Cole seemed to be the most successful.



He joined forces with the Goreys and the firm of Gorey and Cole operates today but was taken over by the Holts and then by Viv Oldfield in May 1988 who continued to use the old name of Gorey & Cole.

Meanwhile the rotary boring plant had come into use and the Centre entered into a new phase of boring. The old percussion plant had done a good job in the Centre and in the early 1960's it was considered that most of the underground water in the Centre had been located. This would have been true if you say water accessible to the old type of plant. But with the introduction of the rotary which could penetrate any type of strata and go to far greater depths than the percussion plants, it was soon apparent that there was still plenty of water in the Centre waiting to be brought to the surface.

Right up to the 1970's it was one thing to sink a bore but quite another to get it pumping and watering stock. It was a rare thing to see a bore that was sunk in the early stages of a drought to open up country for starving stock that actually watered stock before the drought broke.

There were several reasons for this unfortunate position. Firstly none of the contractors who were offering for this class of work had been properly trained in erecting Windmills and installing engines and pumps. At that time the Comet was the popular mill and is a simple mill to put up and quite a few of these contractors could make a good job of putting them up. But the alternative mill, the Southern Cross, was a different proposition, it was a job for a trained man to erect one. They had an oiling system that could be operated from the ground by a hand pump, doing away with the necessity to climb the mill up to the platform 40 feet above the ground, which many Station hands didn't like doing. This mill, in those days, had a bad fault in that there wasn't enough sail space in the wind wheel and they would only pump sufficient water in a very stiff breeze and they were not much used. The Comet on the other hand would keep pumping in very light winds and could be installed by any handy bush mechanic.

With the boring plants then in use it sometimes took 3 months to sink a 200 foot bore then the question was to get it pumping. All the equipment had to be brought from Adelaide, it didn't pay the machinery agents in Alice Springs to carry large stocks and the Stations couldn't order their equipment until they knew the supply and depth of the bore. It would sometimes be a month before the necessary equipment arrived in Alice Springs. The next question was who was going to put it up.



*Randal Stafford and Mrs Colson.*

Amongst the contractors who did this class of work there were about four that had a reputation of being reliable and doing good work but these had long waiting lists and you had to wait sometimes several months for their services.

Eventually they would turn up at the Station and start work, all would go well until they received their first progress payment and went in to Alice Springs for the weekend. I say the weekend but in practice they would seldom be back in a week, and so the job dragged on and very often a bore that was to open new country would still not be operating when the rain came.

Sometime in the early 1960's Southern Cross changed the pattern of the wind wheel of their mill, putting probably 50% more sail space into it, in fact it looked much the same as the Comet wheel and experience went to show that it would pump in even lighter winds than the Comets. Sydney Williams, the manufacturers of the Comet were becoming a run down company after years of success. There was up to 6 months wait for a mill and even Comet parts were becoming hard to get.

Southern Cross now became the popular windmill and today still holds the market. It was still a complicated mill to erect and in, I think, 1968 the Southern Cross Machinery Pty Ltd took the agency from Rumball and Jury and opened their own office and workshop in Alice Springs. I have often thought since that when Southern Cross moved into the Alice it was the first movement of the great change that was coming over the Centre. They certainly brought much more efficiency into the Pastoral industry.

At the same time, two of the old boring contractors, the Goreys and Sandy Cole, joined forces and formed the well known business of Gorey and Cole, using mostly rotary plants which had come in with the oil companies. Some leases still had large areas of land that they were paying rent on and couldn't make use of for the lack of permanent water but the rotary boring plant, with the help of the Geologists of Water Resources, soon proved this to be a fallacy.

There were very few places where there wasn't underground water at some depth and under the hardest type of strata. The rotary plants could penetrate this hard strata, usually dolomite, in a matter of hours whereas the old percussion plants would take weeks to do the same job, if they could penetrate it at all. I know of cases where they have hammered away at it for 3 weeks or so making only 3 inches depth a day, only to have to abandon the site in the end.



This was disastrous for both the boring contractor and the Station as the contractor was paid by the foot it meant that for 3 weeks he had been working for nothing or anyway not enough footage to pay the expenses of running his plant.

For the Station it meant that they were up for perhaps 200 feet of soft drilling before coming to the hard strata, but about this time it was alleviated somewhat by Water Resources. They undertook to refund the cost of a dry hole to the Station, but like all types of Government assistance it had strings tied to it. The site had to be picked by their Geologists and the contractor had to be a licensed Well Driller.

At the same time as these two major events took place there was a marked change in bore equipment. The old draw plunger pump had been used exclusively ever since bores became a reality. The rotary pump was starting to come into use, it was a good pump and could shift much larger quantities of water than the old type. However, it had the disability that it couldn't be successfully used in conjunction with a windmill having a horizontal action, whereas a windmill has a vertical action. This meant that if you wanted to use this type of pump you had to do all your pumping with an engine.

The pumping costs sky rocketed. While its true that the cost of the diesel to run the engines doesn't amount to much, the motor running and time involved in a man coming out from the station to start and stop the engine is what pushes up the running costs of the Station.

A new type of engine now appeared on the scene, the air cooled engine. The air cooled engine had just one overwhelming advantage over the water cooled type. It had been found in major breakdowns when all tanks including the engine cooling tank had gone dry, a day might elapse while water was carted from the nearest source to fill the engine cooling tank. If there was a good wind and the bore had a mill on it you could get enough water to fill the engine tank, but given calm weather and cattle still on the trough another day without water was sometimes fatal.

So Southern Cross Machinery stopped producing their famous old Y.B., it was probably the best 3-4 H.P. job ever produced, and introduced the 3-4 H.P. air cooled engine. At the same time they developed a pump jack of revolutionary design.

It was a truly magnificent piece of engineering skill, all the moving parts were enclosed in a cast iron casing and all moving parts were in an oil bath, and the gear ratio was suited to the faster revving air cooled engines. An air cooled engine has to be a fast revving job for

the fan to produce enough air flow to keep it at the right working temperature, if I remember rightly the Y.B. worked at 1200 revs and the first air cooled engines at 1800 revs. This meant that they were not a success when used with the old style pump jack, the extra speed caused a lot of extra wear and tear with the old style jack and they soon fell to pieces.

A further disability with the air cooled engine was that it could not be installed in an engine house or shed, it had to work in the wind and weather. This didn't seem to effect them much but owing to their high rev working speed they didn't last as long as the old Y.B. After about 4 years service they became very hard to start.

Last but not least of the innovations in water equipment was the introduction of the plastic bore columns and polythene piping. The point about all these other innovations was that they were supposed to be labour saving in view of the coming award rate wages and it is true to say that as far as labour (wages) costs it did much to reduce the number of men employed. But the capital cost of the equipment necessary to achieve this plus the extra motor running and fuel, together with rapidly rising interest rates, far outweighed the cost of wages in dollars and cents that would have been paid under the old system.

The other big development project of this day was fencing and it now became big business. Up to this time anyone who could buy a couple of shovels, a crowbar, a bit and brace and an axe, could set up as a fencing contractor and take a job at about £30 a mile taking months or years to finish the contract and usually finding himself with nothing to take at the end.

Now this speeded up, fence lines were now initially cleared with a bulldozer, the posts instead of being laboriously cut with an axe and trimmed with a hand saw were cut and trimmed with chain saws in a fraction of the time required in the old days. Then there were posthole diggers to replace the old crowbar and shovel. The greatest time saving of all, the posthole borer, made fencing that formally had been regarded as essentially a job for tough guys, became overnight a good past time for school girls.

A further time saver was the introduction of the lightning fence which consisted mainly of iron droppers, which didn't suffer in bushfires to the same extent as wooden posts and can be driven into the ground doing away with the necessity of sinking postholes, except for the strainer posts which remained wood.

These fences could be erected in a matter of days compared with weeks or months by the old method.

But no one seemed to win. The cost of the equipment to get into the fencing game was such that only about two contractors remained on the job and for the Stations the costs per mile of fencing became so high that few could find money for fencing in view of the rising interest rates.

With the deregulation of the Banks there was plenty of finance available but the interest was so high that very few were able to take advantage of it. Few realised that this great change that had come over the Pastoral industry marked its steady drift into the hands of politics and it had now passed the point of no return.

## COMMENTS ON LAND RIGHTS

I have often wondered if, in the scheme of things, it was ever intended there should ever be such a thing. The land belongs to God and God in his own mysterious ways sees to it that it is best occupied by those best able to make use of it. It is an elementary law of nature that pressure moves towards a vacuum, hence if population pressure exits in one area they will move towards the more sparsely populated areas. It has happened all over the world with varying consequences for the indigenous populations.

It needs to be remembered that if the British had not occupied Australia the French most certainly would have done so. Recent events in the Pacific go to show that they are not particularly sympathetic towards Land Rights and Traditional Ownership. Looking right around the world it can be seen that indigenous populations have fared better under a British administration than under any other colonising power and the Australian record in both Australia and New Guinea is as good as any of them.

The great problem faced by the colonising powers in giving their Colonies back to the Traditional Owners was that the westerners didn't understand the different way of thinking of coloured people. They work for Power and Glory whereas the western mind looks towards financial power. The second problem was which group of the indigenous population was to control the country after the colonising power withdrew - in no time they were fighting a civil war amongst themselves or worse still fighting their next door neighbour.



It is pacifist nonsense to say the Third World has not had enough financial assistance from the Western World. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have poured billions into the developing countries and have put the whole financial structure of the western world under threat.

In Africa and Asia most of this money has been wasted on miserable tribal wars, in South and Central America, while there have been wars and revolutions which are nothing new for South America, the major portion of the large amount of assistance they have received from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank seems to have been spent in unprofitable and unwise developments and according to the Conservationists has ruined the rain forests of the Amazon.

They have never been able to meet their Interest bill let alone paying anything off capital.

In Australia, our much abused Lands Rights Act was introduced to settle the Aboriginal problem but in the event pleased no one. It was framed largely on the findings of the Woodward Commission, in its first form it wasn't too unreasonable but it was academic in structure rather than realistic and had too many loopholes open to contest in Court.

When all is said and done what really constitutes Land Rights? Certainly not occupation by several families for several centuries - some of the old families of Britain and Europe had occupied their holdings for 600 years or more, but it was held there and then that these families were keeping the land locked up when it was needed for an expanding population. Crippling taxes were imposed on it and today, in Britain, most of this land is built on and the castles and mansions have been donated to the National Trust. A few have retained their homes by throwing them open to tourists and it is surprising how many people, mostly Americans, who will pay big money to dine with Lord So and So. The more adventurous of these families migrated to the Colonies.

It is inconceivable that the Aborigines could have been left in undisputed occupation of the land once men developed the art of navigation sufficiently to find their way to Australia. It is also inconceivable that through two World Wars that were fought largely for "Liberstrom" they would have been left in sole possession of such a large area of land with great potential resources.

Through the many centuries that they had occupied the Australian Continent they had developed a perfect way of life consistent with the available resources. It was an economy with neither imports or exports,

but utilised all the eatable and drinkable substances within the limits of their group's territory. It has been called a "Food Gathering or Hunting Economy" but perhaps a better word would be a "Survival Economy" and far from being robbed of their country, it seems to me more like a group of ship wrecked people being rescued from a desert island.

They developed a Social Code that was clearly designed to prevent inbreeding amongst the small population that the country would support. It is too complicated to go into here but any breach of it was punishable by death.

It was also part of their Social Code that any member of a group had to share all his or her possessions with all the other members of the group. This has led most white people to believe that the Aboriginal is a very generous kind of person, but this is not so. To anyone who is "not my relation" they can be heartless in the extreme.

I remember once on Tempe Downs an old woman came in out of the bush and was sitting under a gum tree in the shade. She had neither food or water and the Station blacks wouldn't even give her a drink of water - "not our relation", and it is this item of their Social Code that has made it very difficult for them to adapt themselves to the white economy.

The following is a "Statement by the Minister for the Interior, The Hon. P J Nixon on 9 August 1968." distributed during his visit to the Territory.

### **NORTHERN TERRITORY ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS**

*The Minister for the Interior, Mr Nixon, today urged that the question of land rights for Aborigines be considered in a wider context than the emotional plan on which it is frequently presented.*

*The Government is in favour of Aborigines gaining title to land but believes that this should be under the land tenure system which applies to the rest of the community and under conditions which will give them real prospects of improving their position in life.*

*The Government's aim is to ensure in the most effective way possible that all of the opportunities which the Australian community offers for a full and satisfying life are open to every Aboriginal and that all Aborigines are equipped to take advantage of those opportunities in the way which most appeals to them.*

*Singling out the issue of land rights and pressing for areas of land to be granted to groups of Aborigines in remote places would not serve this purpose.*

*On the contrary we could end up with a series of depressed Aboriginal communities tied to a form of sub standard living with a barrier between them and the rest of the Australian community. Separatism and segregation of Aborigines would create here problems now being faced in other countries.*

*The Aborigines in the Northern Territory are not deprived of land rights. A substantial part of the Territory - nearly one-fifth - had been set aside by reservation for the use and enjoyment of Aborigines. Government efforts are being concentrated on the best way of establishing Aborigines on the land in economic areas.*

*This is being done by an examination of resources of reserves to assess the opportunity for development and land settlement. Legislation to provide for titles of land on reserves to be granted to Aborigines is at present before the Legislative Council for the Northern Territory. Funds will come from royalties for mining and forestry projects on reserves which are paid to a special trust fund to assist Aborigines. Also the Prime Minister has announced that a special fund will be set up to provide capital assistance for Aboriginal enterprises.*

*As further land is required Aborigines will be given opportunity to obtain economic blocks. the Aborigines' future in the Northern Territory is not a bleak prospect - it is a prospect of great promises.*

*Government policies are directed towards the objective of the assimilation of Aboriginal Australians as fully effective members of a single Australia society. The Government wishes to avoid measures which are likely to set Aboriginal citizens permanently apart from other Australians through having their development based on separate or different standards.*

*Demands for land grants built up from protests, with only vague generalisations about intended use, and with no thought about how the people could live at a reasonable standard and what opportunity there is for the children, will be detrimental to Aborigines.*

*So far as the claim made on behalf of some of the Gurindji tribe in the Territory for rights to traditional land is concerned, it is by no means clear that the Aborigines themselves had in mind an area of 500 square miles on which to run their own cattle station.*



*They were asking for a residential area where they and their families could live with possibly the opportunity to run a contract droving and mustering business if any of them so wished. The Government has answered this proposal by agreeing to establish a residential area on Crown land at Wave Hill where facilities for education and medical care of Aborigines in the area have been established for some years; and to provide land to run horses if any of the people set up as contract musterers and drovers.*

*In time this residential area will be developed as a town to serve the needs of all the people in this part of the Territory.*

*Neither Wattie Creek nor the site for the township is known to contain sites which are of special sacred significance. As previously announced arrangements are being made to ensure that Aborigines who have been living at Wattie Creek will not be disturbed in their occupancy should they wish to remain there.*

*The laws of the Northern Territory also protect the rights of aborigines who wish to camp, roam or hunt anywhere on the pastoral properties in the Northern Territory.*

*There are perhaps 130,000 people of Aboriginal descent in this country - there are about 20,000 full-blood Aborigines in the Territory. A significant proportion of people of Aboriginal descent are living and making their own way in the community without special assistance. The majority however need some form of assistance and guidance. They all have a legitimate claim to participate in this assistance - no one group has a greater right than the remainder. Whatever is done for one must be capable of application and be applied to all who might seek the same help.*

*Some Aborigines will find their future as landowners. Others will choose to follow a different vocation. The Government's approach is that those who want to take up land and work it in the same way as other Australians do should be assisted to secure land under normal titles. Those who want to find their future in other occupations should also be assisted where necessary.*

*Land rights should be regarded not as an end in themselves but a means to an end. The ultimate end the Government seeks is full participation by Aborigines with other Australians in the life of a single Australian community.*

So we come to the year 1976 when, after several years of meetings and discussions that seemed to get nowhere, a serious effort was made to implement at least some of the claims that had been made over the last 3 years. The first was Wattie Creek which was I think the first claim of this kind made. It was a simple affair to implement as the Gurindji people were the only ones concerned and anyway in the Top End these claims seem easier to decide

A bad mistake had been made in the initial period, the Missions and the Native Settlements at Haasts Bluff and Yuendumu had been handed over to the Aboriginals holus bolus together with the stock and came nominally under Aboriginal control. The Aboriginals were led to believe that the Stations would be compelled to do likewise and in fact 4 Stations in the North West sector were sold to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. But when it came to settling Land Claims in the Centre it wasn't easy.

In the Top End the holdings are far larger than in the Centre and a few hundred square miles doesn't mean much to places like Wave Hill and V.R.D. In the Centre where very few holdings exceed 1500 square miles, any large excision would mean that the Station would become not viable, specially with the Conservationists insisting that it is overstocked as it is.

A second problem confronting the Administration of Land Rights in the Centre is that most of the people living on the Pastoral holdings cannot qualify as traditional owners even though they have lived in the area for three or four generations. Some came into the country originally as drovers with the first stock to come into the country. Others moved into another Station for protection after committing some tribal offence in their own country and very often most of the real Traditional Owners had moved to a Mission or Settlement.

It was simple enough implementing Land Rights on the Reserves and on the Missions and Settlements which had been Aboriginal land for years and had been closed to white people for years, patrolled by the police who were the only whites who could enter for other than the preservation of life and property.

But even here there were endless disputes as to who should have the best blocks, traditional ownership didn't seem to matter very much.

Four Stations in the north west sector had been acquired by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs together with the stock and had now

became Aboriginal Land and there were outstanding claims on the Stations remaining in white hands.

According to a statement by our one time Chief Minister, there was now 50% of Northern Territory land in the hands of the Aboriginals. A glance at the map will show that most of this land is in the Haasts Bluff and Arnhem Land Reserves and as far as the Centre is concerned, at least 90% of this land lies west of the Stuart Highway, with the exception of 1000 square miles of the old Hermannsburg Lease, and belongs to the Luritja tribes of the west.

The Aranda tribes of the east have had no big area allotted to them, they have Utopia Station, about 1958 square kilometres or approximately 720 square miles and even this didn't come to them by the Lands Rights Act, but was bequeathed to them through the will of the previous owner of Utopia Station. It would be quite out of the question to get these people to migrate to the Western Reserve.

So although approximately 50% of the Northern Territory has been returned to the Aboriginals, only approximately 75% of the Aboriginal population can make use of it. Hence my argument that it is not in the interests of either party to make large excisions but to set aside an area of 2 square miles or so in a suitable area for a small settlement and give them undisputed access to their sacred sites and places of significance. These places don't cover much territory and in practice are old Corroboree grounds, caves in the hills where the Churingas are or were stored, and in some cases shady trees. These places would need to be first proven then registered and could be fenced off from the alienated land and out of bounds to white people.

It was a different matter however when it came to implementing the Act on alienated land. Over the years it had been occupied by Pastoralists, the tribes and groups had become very mixed up for one thing the drovers when picking up cattle from a Station would usually have men from round Alice Springs who might belong to any tribe or even have come from interstate. Sometimes a romance would develop while the drover was waiting for the Station plant to deliver the cattle and the upshot of it was that the man would return to the Station after the cattle were loaded and probably work on the Station for years.

At Coniston there should have been no serious doubts of Land Rights. The same 4 families had occupied and worked the Station since the first white occupation and were really a close knit little community but a very quarrelsome one. Up to the time I left Coniston in 1976 I had an offer open to them of 10 square miles of country at Ariqua Waterhole, but they



never took it up as they couldn't agree amongst themselves as to who was to be the Big Chief, and all the Coniston people moved to Mt Allan which had become Aboriginal Land.

Although Glen Helen isn't in the North West sector, I will quote the position of Land Rights there as a matter of interest. It is the complete reverse to Coniston as there were no Traditional Owners. All the families that had occupied and worked the Station over the 40 years I had held it came from Jay Creek, Papunya and a few casual hands from Hermannsburg.

There was one family however, Tom and Sarah Raggatt and 6 children who lived and worked at Glen Helen over most of the 40 odd years I held this Station. Sarah died in 1972 and in 1973 I found Tom dead in his swag at the Tank at the Glen Helen trucking yards after a drinking bout in Alice Springs. These people did form themselves into an Association and lodged a claim on some land on the west side of the Station on the Dashwood Creek. Firstly there was no water on it and secondly they could not make any real claim to it and the matter lapsed and no claim made since on Glen Helen has succeeded.

Brawn Raggatt, Tom's son, has since been allotted a block of land at Yeatman's Bore on the Derring Creek, this was his mother's country and is correct procedure under the Act and Aboriginal law.

It must be admitted that all interested parties, Mining, Pastoral and Aboriginal as well as both the major political parties have used this Act for their own ends when it suited them to do so. The Aboriginal vote saved the Labour party from extinction in the 1983 election, this doesn't mean that a big majority of Aboriginals agreed with the Labour party policy, but that the "White Advisers" on the settlements were mostly people of extreme leftist views.

More progress was made in administering the Land Rights Act under the Liberal Government of Malcolm Fraser than any government before or since. Mr Fraser was the only Prime Minister who took a personal interest in the matter and made a tour of the Settlements to see the Aboriginal problem at first hand. I met him in the course of this tour and had a long and instructive conversation with him and was impressed with his common sense approach to the Aboriginal problem. But anyway I don't think this problem will ever be solved by Party politics, it should be handled by a strictly non political Authority.

As yet the Land Rights Act has made very little impact on the Pastoral industry, but it has had a devastating effect on mining. Mineral deposits that are known to contain enough gold to greatly reduce our crippling overseas debt are locked up while endless discussions on sacred sites and traditional ownership go on ad nauseam, although tourism and conservationists are more responsible for this than the Aborigines.

It is a classic example of how other interests use the Land Rights Act for their own advantage. It is all very well to say that they are conserving our Heritage for future generations, I don't think however that the generations yet unborn will give us much thanks if we leave them a Heritage of vast debts and an economy even sicker than ours is at present.

## THE DECLINE OF THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

Its hard to say just when the cattle industry in the Centre started its downward trend but 1956 would probably be the year in which it reached its peak. From then on it started a slow but definite downward trend. This was due to several causes, most of which were unavoidable as far as the Pastoralists were concerned and they were both seasonal, financial and political.

From 1956 the seasons started to deteriorate, though there was one good rain in January 1962, there wasn't a really good season until 1966. During this long series of adverse seasons, the Stock firms were finding it hard to keep "carry on finance" up to their clients and eventually the Commonwealth Development Bank agreed to take some of the pressure off the Stock Agents.

Right from the start they adopted an ultra cautious policy that was the complete reverse of the ultra liberal policy that the Stock firms had pursued since the end of the second World War and was so slow in operation that it didn't help anyone very much. Most of us formed the opinion that the only way to get money out of the Commonwealth Development Bank would be with either an oxy torch or gelignite.

In 1962 it became generally known that the grand old firm of Goldsborough Mort had been taken over by Elder Smith & Co, at this time a most conservative firm from Adelaide. At first it didn't seem to make very much difference and we all continued merrily along the road to ruin. Trading as Elders GM, things remained much the same until 1966 when the drought broke then things got really tough.

By 1962 many of the Stations had been destocked, there was a keen demand for breeders in South Australia's south east and it was the policy of Elder Smith to get as many Centre cattle as possible into this area rather than let them die in the Centre. But it left open the question of how the Centre was to be restocked when the drought broke.

Coinciding with this period there had been a drift to Politics and Government control of the Pastoral industry. For years the industry, both sheep and cattle all over Australia had kept away from all Government schemes and regulated prices and most of them would face insolvency rather than participate in any of them. My Father, who was a sheep and wool man, always said "You must meet the Market and wool will keep its true value according to the laws of supply and demand". Recent events have shown how right he was.

Towards the close of the 1960's Australia got into the Export Trade. This was hailed with delight by most of the Pastoralists but they didn't realise what they were letting themselves in for. As I said earlier, there had been a steady drift towards politics for some years, now that the Pastoral industry was an Export Industry and looked like becoming a major earner of export income it soon became a tangled maze of bureaucratic regulations and requirements and the Government beheaded the Goose that could have laid the Golden Egg. The cattle producers soon found that Government control of their industry had now become complete.

At first it looked like being a winner and prices for heavy bullocks went higher than they ever had been for years. But where were the heavy bullocks? The policy of the Stock firms since the end of the War had been to encourage the sale of young cattle, "Baby Beef" was all the rage at this time and male cattle had a life expectancy of about 2½ years, some might attain 3 years. Secondly the Stock firms with the blessing of the AIB encouraged the sale of store cattle to the southern dealers and the dealers liked to buy cows with calf at foot. This practice reached terrific proportions during the drought and in this way a lot of potential bullocks went out of the country.

When the Export Trade got underway there were very few cattle of the type the Export Trade wanted available and most of us found that the domestic market was still the best bet.

However the period from 1966 to 1970 was a period of moderate success for the Pastoralists who had not destocked too heavily in the early stages of the drought and had sufficient cattle to take advantage of a rising market.



Those who had destocked had two options, either to sell the Station on a "bare of stock" basis or the second option of buying breeding stock and starting again. But there were a few nasty hurdles to take in doing this, theoretically the Station should have had enough money in the bank from the sale of cattle at the time of destocking to restock when the rain came, but it didn't work that way.

Firstly a Station owner would have to have had a sizeable overdraft before he would consider destocking, secondly even if a Station is completely destocked there are still upkeep expenses to be met. Even though the destocked cattle made good money in South Australia's south east, the original owner would find that he had to raise money to replace them.

At Coniston I had kept the herd intact with minimal losses by moving some over to Glen Helen and in addition to this could draw on breeding stock from Urapunga on the Roper River and was able to sell breeding stock to other Stations.

In 1968 the Stockman's Award came into force and for a time it worked very well for the Stations. At least a Manager would know what he had to pay out in wages and was no longer responsible for feeding the workers' families. It didn't greatly effect the yearly running expenses when it started off in 1968, the Award rate for a Stockman was \$37 per week and was paid monthly, but this was eventually another nail in the coffin of Aboriginal labour.

Under the old system they might be paid three times a year when going for a holiday in slack times after the fats had been trucked and the calves branded, but getting ready money once a month they wanted to go straight away and spend it and it always took another week or more before they got back. As time went on it became hard to get more than a few days work done a month, and grog started to get onto the Stations in large quantities.

The seasons from 1966 to 1970 were all above average years and the country as a whole had never looked better, those who had cattle did very well. But as well as labour and grog all sorts of other problems were becoming troublesome. Land Rights, which had only been a vague sort of idea which most of the Station people thought would never come to pass now became a real issue. The Government, with the blessing of the Conservationists, had formed the idea that the country was overstocked and now before a project could be undertaken you would have to spend perhaps 2 years while the powers that be studied its impact on the environment.

Finally in 1972 the TB and Brucellosis Campaign was started and this much abused project has probably done more than any other to bring about the decline of the cattle industry than any other single cause.

When the Whitlam Government came to power in 1972 all these problems that had been smouldering for years suddenly burst into flame and the Aboriginal became a law unto himself and HERSELF too. The whole Aboriginal population went on an alcoholic celebration which lasted for several years.

But it had far reaching effects on the Pastoral industry that was geared to Aboriginal labour. Then, at the end of 1973, the market which had been good since 1966, started its most dramatic fall in the history of the cattle industry. It was due to the Export Trade buying too heavily all over the world and the fridges in all exporting countries were full of meat they couldn't sell. By 1974 the price of livestock had fallen far below the cost of production.

1974 was a year of floods in the NT and elsewhere in Australia, it was also the year that Aboriginal labour finally became unemployable. And now a further trend of Government policy caused a further downward trend in the Pastoral Industry. This was the tendency of the Government to push Tourism at the expense of the Pastoralists. Land Rights has been blamed for reducing the areas available for grazing but actually Tourism and the Conservationists were claiming far greater areas for National Parks and general tourist purposes and wanted to acquire large areas of land that had little or no tourist appeal. Once they acquired this land they insisted on destocking it.

From 1974 on, owing to the difficulty of obtaining labour, it was necessary to increase mechanisation. Mechanisation may be more efficient but it is also more expensive. Fuel bills rose perhaps several hundred percent, repair bills became a real problem, taxation and interest rates soared into the sky. By the 1980's most of the old time Pastoralists had sold out and the cattle industry in the Centre could be said to be under new management.

The new comers found themselves so bound up by bureaucracy that they haven't made much effort to rebuild the cattle business. Some have contemplated going into Tourism in conjunction with running cattle, others have hoped to resell the Station at inflated values.

I was recently talking to a man I had met in Alice Springs in the 1930's who was revisiting Alice Springs in 1989. In the course of conversation he said "You know things have changed in this town, when

I was here last you only heard 3 topics of conversation, prices at the last cattle market, who was trucking next week and when it was going to rain again. On this trip 55 years later I have heard nothing but the best Tours to make and the best people to travel with, the only other topic would be the latest political scandal."

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

We have now entered the 1990's and the whole country not only the North West sector is a very different looking place to what it was when I first saw it in 1921.

The development and change in living conditions that has come about in that period of 70 years is truly remarkable. People today still grizzle about isolation and poor living conditions in outlying districts but they should take a journey back in time to the days when the Overland Telegraph and the fortnightly mail were the only means of contacting the outside world, or turn on their radio or ring someone up on STD and then tell themselves that they have never seen real isolation or tough living conditions. Cooking over the past 70 years had changed from hot ashes and Camp Ovens to Microwave and it is a rare thing now days to see even a useable wood stove. Most of the outlying Stations generate their own 240 volt electricity or use gas for cooking, even on the furthest outlying Settlements.

70 years ago the country depended on animal power for transport and the needs of their daily lives but today everything has become mechanised. The helicopter, motor bike and Land Rover have replaced the Stockhorse and 3 unit Road Trains have replaced the old overland drover. In mining bulldozers and various other machines have taken much of the hard yaker out of the work and enabled many deposits that have been known for years to be worked at a profit.

The North West sector doesn't appear to be particularly rich in minerals, but it has been more thoroughly prospected on the surface than any other area and the only mineral wealth turned up to date has been wolfram at Mt Hardy and the well known payable gold at the Granites and Tanami, which was worked by the Chapmans for some years without result. They had tried to interest Mt Isa Mines who did take an option on it but failed to exercise the option to the Chapman's bitter disappointment. About 3 years ago North Flinders Mining achieved an agreement with the Traditional Owners and started operations making use of modern equipment and technology, their report from 1989-1990 shows a profit of \$18 million and state they are able to treat a million tons of ore yearly.



However, the North West Sector has nothing of tourist value anywhere and North Flinders had no difficulty in reaching a workable agreement with the Traditional Owners whereas the BHP, with all its influence, has been negotiating for years at Coronation Hill and have never looked like reaching an agreement. Could it be that the real objections to developing Coronation Hill come from Tourism and Tourism is using the Land Rights Act for their own ends.

As yet there has been very little oil exploration done in the North West, about the middle 60's a French company did some test holes in the vicinity of Tilmouth's Well, at the time it was said that the results were not encouraging. But recently there has been talk of further prospecting in this area and it may be that one day Australia will have more oil than the Middle East.

The prospects for the Pastoral industry do not appear bright in the short term, but in the long term, when the benefits of the BTEC campaign have had time to take effect, it is possible that the Pastoral industry of Australia may become Australia's No. 1 earner of export income. But before this can come about a lot of idealistic policies, Conservation, Land Rights and large scale resumption of pastoral land for National Parks and Tourism, will have to be wound down considerably to a point where the project in question becomes viable to both parties.

A hotly contested point in the Land Rights has been the ownership of the Stock Routes and the Stock Route watering places, bores and dams. There is nothing in the Land Rights Act which would give the Aborigines any claim on them, they are clearly alienated pastoral land. But I can see no reason why families couldn't occupy the watering places so long as the Stock Routes remained open if required. The fact that the watering places were occupied would tend to ensure that the equipment didn't deteriorate when not used for long periods. Even before the present Gulf crisis there was talk of reopening the Stock Route when the new scale of registration fees made the operation of large Road Trains too expensive.

Now, with the price of petrol and diesel going through the roof I would say that the very existence of the Pastoral industry depends not only on reopening the Stock Routes but for the Station hands to ground their helicopters, park their motor bikes and 4 wheel drives and get back into the saddle. There might be something then in being a Pastoralist.

Mechanisation of the Pastoral industry sounds wonderful I know but it is far more expensive than employing a labour force to do the same work

and by employing men instead of machines you are helping to solve one of the country's major problems, unemployment. In the Pastoral industry this would go some way towards solving the problem of Aboriginal unemployment.

The Pastoral industry is the only one in sight that can offer much employment to Aboriginals as they are today and secondly it is an overstatement by the average Pastoralist of today that now days you can't get men to ride horses and learn stockwork. The recent Overland Drive, which was to be the last droving trip, went to show that there are still plenty of young men keen to go on the road in the old style.

The real trouble is that the present cattle man can't show them how to do it, but again the Drive went to show that there are still plenty of men in the country capable of taking charge of a travelling mob of cattle. I would repeat, specially with war a distinct possibility, by all means allow Aboriginal families to settle on the Government bores, but keep the Stock Routes open to travelling stock and make it a condition that the stock tanks must be kept full at all times.

The financial structure under which a Station operates is largely responsible for the ultimate success or failure. There are five possible forms of structure under which a Station can be operated in the NT, individual ownership, a partnership, as a family unit, a Pastoral Propriety Company or today as a Public Company, which is only possible for very big capital and several Stations.

Of these options individual ownership has proved to be the most workable, but only for the working life of the owner. Partnerships seldom last long unless both partners have ready cash and make equal contributions to capital and both parties know the country and stock, this is a rare thing.

The small family company is a good thing at first while the boys are still young but as they grow older they naturally develop on different lines, form controversial ideas and usually find themselves all pulling in different directions after a few years. There is also the problem of marriage and all the problems that families have had to face from the beginning of time. A family that depends on a Station for their living can find that family affairs can take more money out of the business than the Station can stand, in the Centre the only family that has stood the test of time are the Hayes of Undoolya.

The Pastoral Proprietary company is a good financial structure to operate a large Station or a group of smaller ones, but is difficult to

operate in the Northern Territory as it is hard to get the Directors to follow Company rules. Where they have outside interests either business or family each Director expects to run the Company to his own particular advantage and to take large amounts of money out of the business for his family needs in the same way as he would if he were the individual owner.

The big Public company doesn't seem suitable for the NT as the recent failure of the Sherwin Cattle Company has shown. There isn't the money in the NT to finance projects of this size and until recently a Public Company could not be registered in the NT. But assuming a group of Territorians floated a Company to control several Stations they would probably have to borrow money for working capital interstate and unless they could produce sufficient stock to pay off their overdraft within 3 years the Company would be wide open to takeover by interstate interests or the Japanese and the profits of Territory production go interstate or to Japan.

*"For the banks are all broken they say,  
And the merchants are all up a tree;  
When the bigwigs are brought to the Bankruptcy Court,  
What chance for a squatter like me?"*

At present, in the last few months of 1990, the future of all types of Primary Production look bleak, wool, wheat and meat all seem to be worth less than the cost of production.

In the case of both wool and wheat this seems to have come about largely through the Government's efforts to create artificial price levels through the Wheat Pools and the AWC and has resulted, in the case of wool, in the accumulation of huge stock piles.

But in the case of cattle, politics have not got the same measure of control over the marketing of both livestock or meat and both the sales of stock and meat are free between buyer and seller and so the domestic market remains much the same as it always was. But once an industry becomes an Export Industry some measure of political control is inevitable and consists mainly in ensuring that the meat meets the health requirements of the importing country and is slaughtered under hygienic conditions. This can be a very expensive business since it means upgrading the domestic meatworks to export standard and this can run into millions. Likewise it is necessary for the Stations to upgrade their properties so the veterinary tests required for export can be carried out on the Station. This isn't as expensive as upgrading the abattoirs but it is beyond what the average Pastoralist can afford.



Its anybody's guess what the Pastoral industry will look like by the year 2000, provided the Government can stabilise the Australian economy and sticks to its policy of Privatisation, it should be Australia's No. 1 Export earner. In the past it was said that "Australia rode on the sheep's back", but while the Jumbuck will always be a good friend to Australia it looks as if we will ride to prosperity on the bullock's rather than the sheep's back.

Tourism, it is said that Tourism is or will become the Territory's No. 1 industry, but the future of Tourism is not really as rosy as it looks at first sight. A fact that few realise is that the people of the NT don't benefit much from the big organised tours, the airlines and the big interstate tourist companies who operate the tours get all the ticket value, the local Lodge operators only get the servicing of these tours for a day or so. This is considerable but is very expensive to run and the local Lodges depend more on their Bar trade than Tourism in its pure form. It is a job that requires perfection and is the hardest kind of work.

To exist in the Tourist game one must be prepared and able to work 12 to 14 hours a day and the tragic part of it is that no one seems to really make money, judging by the large number of business failures both local and interstate. But win or loose it doesn't generate much money for reinvestment in the NT.

Tourism is strictly a luxury industry and produces nothing, but if the international Tourist can be persuaded to visit Australia it could bring in a lot of international exchange for a Government grappling with a huge unmanageable overseas debt. The most beneficial type of Tourist for the NT is the itinerant travelling with his own car and perhaps a caravan. He and she are usually freer spenders than the organised tour type, most of whom have probably saved up for several years to make the trip. The itinerant usually visits all the local Lodges and patronises either Motels or the several Caravan Parks available in Alice Springs.

The Casinos established in Alice Springs and Darwin were started to attract big gamblers from South East Asia and Japan but the Alice Casino has proved a flop as far as bringing overseas money into the country and there are whispers that the Big Time Gamblers from South East Asia have taken some \$26 million out of the country. In my young days a wise old man said to me "Boy don't ever play cards with a Chinaman".

The biggest problem facing Tourism is financing their own transport. The cost of the average airconditioned coach varies from \$62,000 for a small 7 seater for short runs to \$280,000 - \$300,000 for a big coach used

by the interstate Companies that can seat 48 passengers. Interest on \$300,000 would be at least \$54,000 per annum.

The Tourist operators buy their vehicles through Hire Purchase or Lease at high interest and usually find that by the time a vehicle is paid off it is worn out and he has to buy a new one and start all over again with the Hire Purchase Company.

It is this system that has led to the failure of a lot of Tourist Companies, both local and interstate. The recent failure of Deluxe Coachlines is an example of how the upkeep of vehicles can erode profits.

The biggest threat to Tourism is however at the moment the situation in the Middle East, even if it doesn't come to shooting it out the cost of fuel will remain high for years to come. If it does come to shooting, Tourism will come to a standstill, not only here in the NT but everywhere.

Mineral production in the NT generally has made some big leaps forward and its future should be bright, but it is tied hand and foot by the Land Rights Act and has been prevented from developing deposits known to have the capacity to greatly reduce Australia's overseas debt.

Most Aborigines take a keen interest in prospecting and mining and are always on the lookout for "Pretty or heavy stones" and most of the surface shows that have been discovered by the old pick and shovel prospectors, not by painstaking searching with pick, shovel and gold dish, but were shown to them by the Blacks. It was usually done in this way, the prospector would camp on some waterhole in likely country and any Abos who visited his camp would bring any likely looking stones along, the Abos had a surprising knowledge of minerals, particularly wolfram and tin, and if the prospector saw anything likely to be of value they would readily show him where it had come from. They had expectations of employment on the mine and plenty of tucker if the deposit proved worth working and were always keen for it to succeed. There was never talk of sacred sites or environmental impact in those days.

These days with metal detectors and geiger counters such methods of prospecting are out of date, but with all the improved technology it hasn't turned up much that wasn't known 50 years ago. Where the new technology has shown results is in the development of these old shows discovered by the old prospectors with the help of the Blacks.

But now the big Companies with the capital and technical know how are prevented in many cases from proceeding with the full development of these mineral deposits. As soon as the Company is ready to start operations a sacred site is discovered in the vicinity or some endangered species is said to be nesting nearby and I would say that the future of the mining industry lies in getting rid of, for the want of a better word, this Bullshit, and taking their rightful place in stabilising the Australian economy.

## THE ABORIGINAL

It would be very hard to forecast the future of the Aboriginal over the next 50 years, but a good deal depends on the outcome of the next Federal Election and what happens in the next 10 years. There has been talk of a Black State and a Treaty with the Aborigines, but neither proposition seems to have awakened much interest amongst the Blacks themselves, possibly because they would have no conception of the issues involved.

A Black State would seem to be outside the realms of practical politics, in fact extra territorial rights and a Treaty has to be negotiated between Governments not individuals or groups of individuals and would be impossible to draw up effectively. I can't see that either proposition would alter the present living conditions of the Aborigines in any way what so ever.

In practice there is already a Black State unofficially in existence, the Haasts Bluff and Arnhem Land Reserves. A white Australian has to get a Passport called a permit to enter Aboriginal land. What makes the Land Rights Act so unpopular with many white people is that although we have to get a permit to enter Aboriginal Land an Aboriginal can enter white territory to buy alcohol or anything else he needs, make a lot of trouble around the Stations or in Alice Springs without getting permission to cross the border. I have always thought this attitude rather paltry but with many white Territorians, specially those born in the Territory or who came in the early days, it has made Land Rights like a red rag to a bull.

After 60 years of close contact with Aborigines I have always thought that if they have a future it is with the Pastoral industry. There is nothing but the dole ahead of them in town. But for them to establish a Pastoral industry of their own presents many problems. Back in the 1960's a film was produced on Coniston which was supposed to show that Aborigines were capable of running a Pastoral business. The film was a great success and widely acclaimed in Abo circles.



When the film was edited and shown the producer and photographer, Roger Sandall, asked me my opinion of it. My reply was that it proved two things, first that Abos are quite competent to handle cattle as far as the trucking yard gate, secondly after that they haven't got a clue.

Its hard to see education in its present form improving the chances of them becoming self supporting and I don't think either the Education Department or the Government can be blamed for this. The fault lies with the people themselves, its easy enough to get children started in school but they soon lose interest after a couple of weeks and only attend spasmodically. Secondly the parents don't take much interest in it themselves and don't care much whether the kids go to school or not. But perhaps where the Education Department may be at fault is that they don't seem to be able to teach them to speak understandable English. But here again the main fault lies with the parents at home, they use a language that is a queer mixture of their own tribal languages, English and any other Aboriginal languages with which they may be familiar

## HEALTH

Its a moot point whether modern living conditions have improved or worsened Aboriginal health. It has certainly brought about a dramatic change in their physic, from being a lean skinny legged people they have become a race of heavy weights. Alcohol has wrought some big changes in them and their own particular disease seems to be sugar diabetes. This is not surprising since they have had contact with the whites they have consumed vast quantities of sugar.

On the Stations in the 1930's and 1940's I found that as long as they stayed on the Station the health remained good, but if they went into any of the larger settlements like Alice Springs or Hermannsburg an epidemic of bad colds would develop. I was at Tempe Downs through most of the 1930's and we used to truck the cattle at Rumbalara in those days, the Station workers only came in contact with others at Henbury and Horseshoe Bend and we never had a case of serious illness on the Station all the time I was there. There were however a lot of very bad sore eyes from cattle blight.

After I left Tempe and moved to Glen Helen and the cattle were trucked at Alice Springs it was noticeable that the stock boys would usually come back from trucking with bad colds and as time went on and war broke out with Army camps springing up the GUTS ACHE (gastroenteritis) started to appear with devastating effects amongst the young children.

But it was the same with health problems as it was with education. The Government did its best to provide good medical services for the Abos but they would only make use of them as a last resort, preferring their old witchdoctors.

Here again, unless the treatment was actually carried out in Hospital it was of little use to them. It is quite useless for the Doctor to say to an Aboriginal patient, "Take 1 of these tablets every 4 hours for 3 days and then come back here." The patient might take 1 tablet when he or she got home and then put them away somewhere and forget about the whole thing. I have looked through some of their belongings from time to time and have found quantities of expensive drugs that have been opened but hardly touched.

A lot of adverse criticism has been levelled at the Alice Springs Hospital from time to time over the way they treat Aboriginal patients. Some years ago I spent 3 months in the Alice Hospital with a broken leg and had plenty of time to study this matter. I could see nothing to it but that they always got kindly and understanding treatment from the Hospital staff. In fact the Sisters seemed to take a lot more nonsense from them than they would from white patients. It must be exasperating for the Doctors when, after a long and expensive treatment, the patient suddenly walks out, and this is constantly happening.

As I have said earlier, the Aboriginal full blood can learn little or nothing by explanation but can learn to do almost anything by demonstration. While there are a few, the average full blood seems to have no power of abstract thought, but most seem to have memories for anything they have seen superior to ours.

## TOURISM

So now we are approaching the last few months of the first year of the 1990's so lets take a look at both the past and the future. We only have to go back 10 years and view the changes that have taken place in that decade. With deregulation of the Banks and the sealing of the south road Tourism started to boom. To meet this growing demand the face of Alice Springs was changed completely in the last 6 months of 1987 and where the old Stuart Arms once slaked the thirst of Stockmen and Miners now stands the Ford Plaza. I sometimes wonder if you went there at night if you would see the ghost of old Scotty Powers with his bag of tools coming round to fix Joe Kilgariff's lighting plant.

On the other side of the Todd Mall Gorey's Arcade vanished in a cloud of dust and two new ultra modern arcades arose out of the rubble. All over the town it was the same story, so many old buildings were being bulldozed that it looked as if the long expected nuclear attack the anti-nukes are so frightened of had hit the town. But it was remarkable how quickly the mess was cleaned up and the traders opened for business with high hopes of becoming millionaires in a few years.

But it is a sad story today, walk through the Ford Plaza and you will see everywhere shops advertising closing down sales, some already closed up and you seldom open the local paper without it is running a story of some big accommodation house going into receivership.

It makes one wonder if the Tourist dollar is so important to the people of the Centre. I can't see myself that upgrading the town and some tourist Lodges in this extravagant manner has benefited local business in any way. On the contrary it has put many locals out of business after years of hard work. But looking into the future we can see interstate interests taking over these failed businesses at a greatly reduced cost, then they may show a profit.

Again returning to the changing face of Alice Springs it hasn't made life easier for the people of the town or the people of the outlying districts either and it certainly hasn't brought down the cost of living. In the old Gorey's Arcade there was an eating house and coffee shop "Neddy's Nosebag" and when in town I often used to drop in there for a cup of coffee and sometimes would have lunch there to save going home. In the old days a cup of coffee cost .60¢, when the upgraded version of the old place went into business the price of a cup of coffee went up to \$1.20, an immediate rise of 100% and it was the same with most things.



Now I always go home for a cup of coffee and for meals, so it looks as if by the year 2000 the Tourist industry will be in the hands of two or three big interstate Companies and the people who developed it will be sitting down on the Pension.

Its the same story in the Pastoral Industry, the men who built it up, drilled bores, built the yards and fenced the land are, if they are still alive, living in retirement with the assistance of Social Services. In most cases they were pressurised into selling out before the deregulation of the Banks and the consequent dramatic rise in the values of stock and property. Most of these buyers were not interested in making the Station a lifetime project but over a period of about 5 years upgraded the property to the requirements of the B.T.E.C. campaign.

Then came Bank deregulation, the glut in the Export Trade was overcome and cattle prices rose to an unprecedented height and the speculative buyers of the 1970's and the properties which they had paid for in hundreds of thousands resold in the mid 1980's for millions. The interest on a million at 18% is \$180,000 so the question they must ask themselves is "Where do we stand if there is a sudden drop in the values of stock and property?"

It seems unlikely that the values could go much higher but they might very easily go lower and even if they stayed where they are, some of them have been heavily destocked by B.T.E.C. and by 1992 will find that they only have a limited turn off unless they buy further breeding stock.

So here we are standing just through the gate of the 1990's after 60 years in the country, 50 of which I spent as an executive in the Pastoral industry, I would say to the Pastoral industry, get back into the saddle, re-open the Stock Routes and as far as possible de-mechanise the industry.

To Tourism I would say after a limited practical experience of it in the 60's, concentrate more on the importance of the local trade and the interstate visiting motorist, the itinerant tourist who don't require such a high standard of accommodation as the international tourist. In this way all business could be booked in Alice Springs and they would then be less dependant on the big interstate agencies.

There has also been talk of joint ventures with the Aborigines, while this is a splendid idea in theory, I very much doubt if it would work in practice owing to the Aboriginal way of thinking.

They expect immediately to get big money out of a business and if not forthcoming loose interest in it.

If big money does happen to come in they take everything out of the business and put nothing back and expect the Government to make further advances to carry on the business. But it is a good idea and might be worth a try and could be a success in the long term, in the short term I can see nothing but strife for both parties and the ultimate success would depend on both parties surviving the short term.

I would say to the Tourist industry, don't try to make it any bigger than it is and don't try and make any further resummptions of Pastoral land for National Parks. This can be more expensive in area to the Pastoralist than the Land Rights Act. The conservationists and greenies say the country has been overstocked in the past, yet listening to Labour's policy speech for the coming election it was proposed to reduce the size of Pastoral holdings to what they described as a living area, most of them are barely that already, and the land so excised to be used for National Parks and Horticulture.

Horticulture is of doubtful viability anywhere in the Northern Territory, the climatic conditions are against it, Mr Dahlenburg had a magnificent garden at Ti Tree, into which he put years of hard work, but it all went for nothing in half an hour in one of the devastating hail storms that sweep the country from time to time.

Those who have never experienced one of these hail storms have no idea of the havoc they can cause. I have seen two at Glen Helen that cut swaths about 10 miles wide through the country and striped every leaf and small twig off the bush trees. Hail stones can lie 2 inches deep on the ground and kill all ground vegetation to the roots by the freezing temperature. After one of these storms two Aborigines were found dead on the side of Haasts Bluff, but it is not clear whether they were killed by hail stones or struck by lightening. So much for Horticulture. But it could, with luck, produce something.

However taking over good Pastoral land for National Parks is a different matter, left in the hands of the Pastoralist the land could produce many tons of protein for a hungry world. National Parks seem to be of limited use to anyone including the Tourist operator, owing to the many things you can't do in them and the only people that get anything out of them at all are a few Hi Brow bush walkers and scientists.

I can recall a cartoon I once saw, I think in the Bulletin, of a young couple walking in a National Park, they had paused to read a formidable array of notices "No Shooting" "No Fishing" "No Swimming" "No Camping" the girl looked at him with a roughish look in her eye and said "Well it doesn't say we can't do it!".

To the Aborigines I would say, don't press for large areas of land under the Land Rights Act but be content with an area on which a small settlement could be made for the local people, 2 square miles should suffice, and have undisputed access to any proven sacred sites or places of significance in the vicinity but not actually in the settlement area. I think it would be found in practice that these places would be seldom visited.

By all means keep the Dreamtime as a Tradition but don't try to live by Dreamtime Traditions in the Electronic age.

As this is being written there is an election in progress for Officers of the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and while I meet many Aborigines in the course of the day, not one that I have met today has voted or seems to take the slightest interest in it. They can't say they didn't know about it, Imparja has been running an ad on their program for about a month.

Last night I listened to the ABC "Australia Tonight" and a discussion on A.T.S.I.C., and while I can't say I wholly approve of it, it seemed to be a genuine attempt by the Federal Government to unite all Aborigines in Australia. This would be the start of Aboriginal Government which is necessary in order to carry out their policy of making a Treaty with the Aborigines, this might be possible some time in the next 1000 years but is a far cry today.

The best advice we can give them is to forget their family quarrels and tribal feuds, some of which concern incidents that happened over 100 years ago before white settlement (see Strehlow's Journey to Horseshoe Bend) and perhaps then it would be possible to negotiate a meaningful Treaty with them. But a Black State is a different matter. It seems to me it would be getting pretty close to "Extra Territorial Rights" and secondly, the definition of Apartheid is "The simultaneous development of two races in the same area but apart", I ask you what would this be?



## THE DARWIN TO ALICE RAILWAY

On the ABC Regional News this morning (7 November 1990) there were two items that were of great interest to the people of Central Australia, white and black.

The first concerned the building of the Railway between Alice Springs and Darwin and the second concerned the funding of Outstations branching out from isolated Settlements.

First regarding the Railway, I have never agreed with the NT Government that it was either necessary or desirable to build it at all from the point of view of the people of Central Australia, and in particular the people of Alice Springs. The benefits would be minimal and in view of the large capital investment in road transport would spell ruin to a large section of the business community.

The broadcast pointed out that road transport had brought \$36 million into the local economy and provided a lot of jobs for local people. Build the railway and all this disappears into the South. It seems to me that a more realistic project would be to forget old state jealousies and agreements now hopelessly out of date owing to changing conditions and build a line from Mt Isa in Queensland to Tennant Creek NT, leaving the gap between Alice Springs and Tennant to be completed some time after the turn of the century if traffic warranted it. Lets hope by that time it could be done with Australian money and labour, not Japanese.

It has been said that the old 3'6" line from Oodnadatta paid for itself by cattle traffic and was the only payable line in Australia. The cattle freight accruing from the country in this gap would be negligible and would depend on where the trucking yards were located. While there are considerable cattle still in this area, most stock owners would find it just as easy to send them straight to Alice Springs and their traditional markets. What many people don't realise is that even if a railway line runs through a Station it may still be necessary to travel the cattle 100 miles or more to the nearest trucking yard.

From anywhere north of Tennant Creek the movement of cattle is to the east to the big meat works on the eastern seaboard and to fattening country into Queensland and NSW. This has been the traditional market for the big Stations of the Barkly for years and they would be very loathe to change.

The only other possibilities of considerable freight would be ore from the Tennant Creek mines, copper ore, and this would most certainly be better served by going east through Mt Isa rather than the long haul to Adelaide and round the coast to the treatment plants at Pt Kembla.

I have held these views on the construction of this Railway for a long time and it is gratifying to me to find, after listening to the broadcast on the ABC, that at least someone thinks as I do.

## THE FUNDING OF OUTSTATIONS

The policy of outlying settlements encouraging their people to move further out and establish Outstations is a good one. No so much for the stated purpose of allowing them to keep their old culture and make economic progress, as to split up the warring factions that are constantly fighting amongst themselves if they stay in one big group around the main Settlement. This, if at the best, results in them living in a sort of shaky truce and at the worst battle, murder and sudden death.

The prospect of any economic development at these Outstations is nil for the foreseeable future. There would not be enough area to run cattle and the Aboriginal is not suited to either Agriculture or Horticulture and likewise neither Agriculture or Horticulture is suited to the Centralian climate. The only thing I can envisage is Angora Goats, but this would be unpopular with the greenies owing to the damage goats do to the environment.

The question of drinking water on these Outstations is a difficult one and should never have arisen. If this area is really their Traditional land and their forefathers occupied it for, some say 2000 years and others say 20,000 years, there must have been at least enough drinking water in the area to live on as long as they kept to their old life style. The fault would seem to be that the Outstations were sited possibly on the advice of Europeans and not left to the Blacks themselves, they always knew where to find enough water to live on, but this might be wholly inadequate for present or modern living conditions.

Nowhere was this more apparent than on Coniston. Their camp site at the old Coniston Homestead was always held not to have enough water to make any developments towards a better life style possible, but they had occupied this site for 30 years with Randall Stafford and for 32 with me and they really loved it. It was in itself a place of considerable significance to them, many of the old people were buried there and their most sacred site was a cave on the Gardiner Range about 2 miles away.

I could never see myself why they couldn't have continued to live there for the next 60 years in the same style as they had for the last 60 years yet they were allotted a block of land with no known drinking water on it at all. The ultimate result was that they moved in a body to Mt Allan which had been bought by the Department for the Aboriginals, but some drifted on from there to Alice Springs and became fringe dwellers.

One of the girls, Doris, was murdered in the Todd, one boy, a son of Peter Stafford and one of the true Traditional Owners, was kicked to death in the Todd and one old woman Eileen McCormack disappeared without trace in 1987. However some children out hunting in the hills came on her remains just recently and it is worth mentioning that the family have arranged to have her remains interred at the old camp at Coniston, a spot she dearly loved.

## CONCLUSION

So here we are in the last few weeks of 1990 which opened with such high hopes of world wide peace and prosperity but is closing with a bleak outlook indeed with war a real possibility in the New Year and the midday news speaking of Australia being in a "Technical Recession". I don't know what the difference is between a Technical Recession and a real one is, but either way I should say it was time to take your belt up a hole to two.

It is about 4.45pm and I am sitting on a very uncomfortable seat in front of Woolworths, the bus interchange, waiting for a bus to take me home. I had been to the Bank, my calls at the Bank these days are quite friendly affairs, not like the old days when I was a Pastoralist and a borrower and a visit to the Bank Manager was something like the summons to the Head Master's Study back in school days.

Leaving the Bank I strolled through the Ford Plaza, several shops were showing closing down sales and I paused at one of them and bought a shirt for \$15.00. The same shirt had been advertised a few months before at \$39.00. The offices of DeLuxe Coachlines showed about as much life as the tomb of an Egyptian Pharaoh, the temperature was hovering around 40°C and the only place that seemed to be doing any business was the Ice Cream Parlour.

Walking to the Post Office I collected the mail from my Private Box, there was one letter of importance the rest, which was considerable, was circulars advertising wonderful bargains for Christmas. I kept walking



and got a few things for supper at Woolies and took my seat at the bus stop to wait for the 4.00pm bus home.

One thing I will say about the Alice Springs Bus Service is it is very convenient for people who haven't got the use of a car, they can do their shopping at the Woolworths complex, Yeperenye, and get a bus home without having to lug a load of plastic bags over long distances.

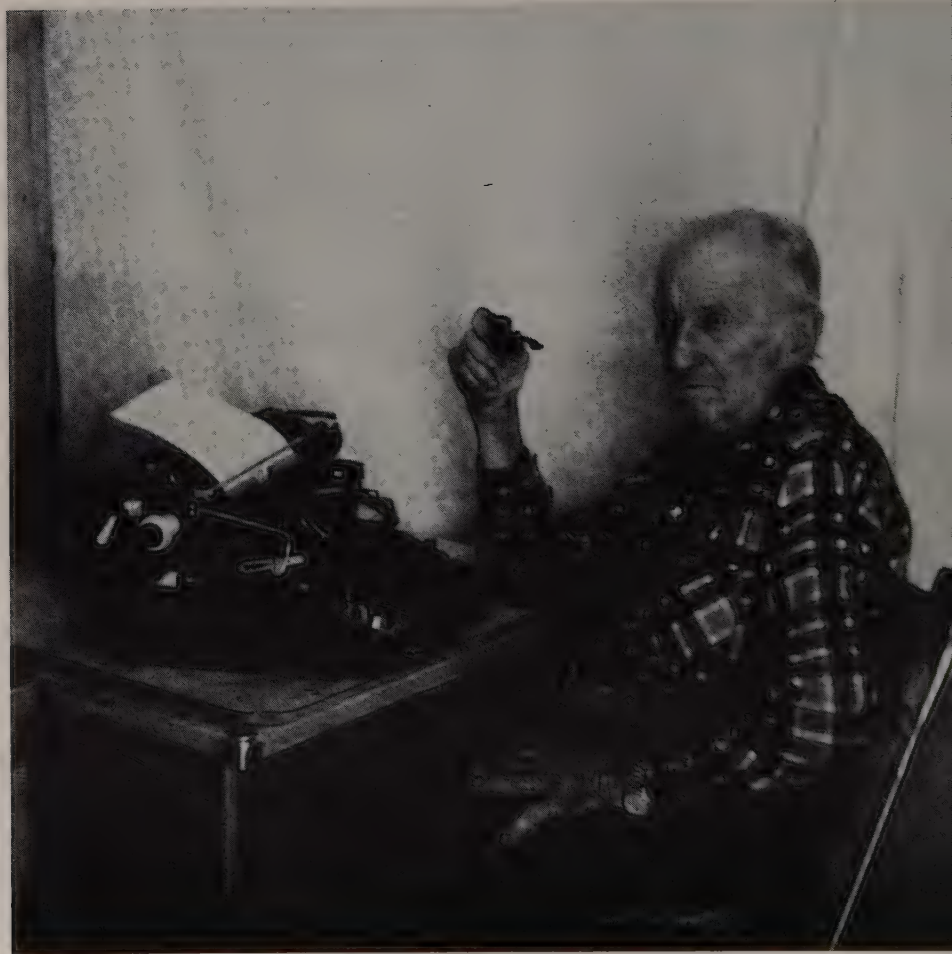
There was a constant stream of traffic up and down Hartley Street, noisy motor bikes and almost every other type of motor vehicle from Mini Minors to huge air conditioned Tourist buses.

I say almost, but there were two notable absentees, the Station utility and the Landrover, of tourism there was plenty of evidence but of the Pastoral industry not a sign.

Above the roar of the traffic someone could be heard screaming about love and a broken heart, and I couldn't help thinking how much I would give to be back on some Station where at this time of day you would hear the horse bells in the distance and perhaps a Corroboree song coming from the camp. The only screams to be heard would come from the Goat Yard where the Goat Shepherd was endeavouring to yard her refractory charges for the night.

But these dreams came to an end as the driver opened the bus doors and the passengers took their seats and a little verse that was sometimes heard on the Stations 40 or 50 years ago made me wonder if I really would like to go back to the cattle camps.

*Riding home at sunset  
With a soul so full of hope  
To find ants in the Golden Syrup  
And the crows have pinched your soap.*



*Bryan Bowman - September 1991*

## CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF MY 54 YEARS IN THE PASTORAL INDUSTRY

In May 1930 I took over Tempe Downs as Manager for Robert Crawford, a sheep man of Bimbowrie Station in north east South Australia. He died in 1932 and as the Crawford family had little interest in cattle the family accountant, F.A. Hince, bought Tempe and persuaded me to take a half share in it and continue as Manager. This arrangement continued till 1938 when the Partnership was determined and I went to Glen Helen.

I took over Glen Helen in August 1938 and held the lease till March 1979 when I converted to a Company, Hele Pty Ltd, and continued with Hele as Secretary till 1984 when I sold all my shares in the Company.

In 1946 I bought Coniston from Randal Stafford and worked this Station in conjunction with Glen Helen until 1976 when I sold Coniston to Max Lines.

In 1954 I bought a controlling interest in Urapunga on the Roper River, we sold Urapunga to Ray Fryer in 1968.

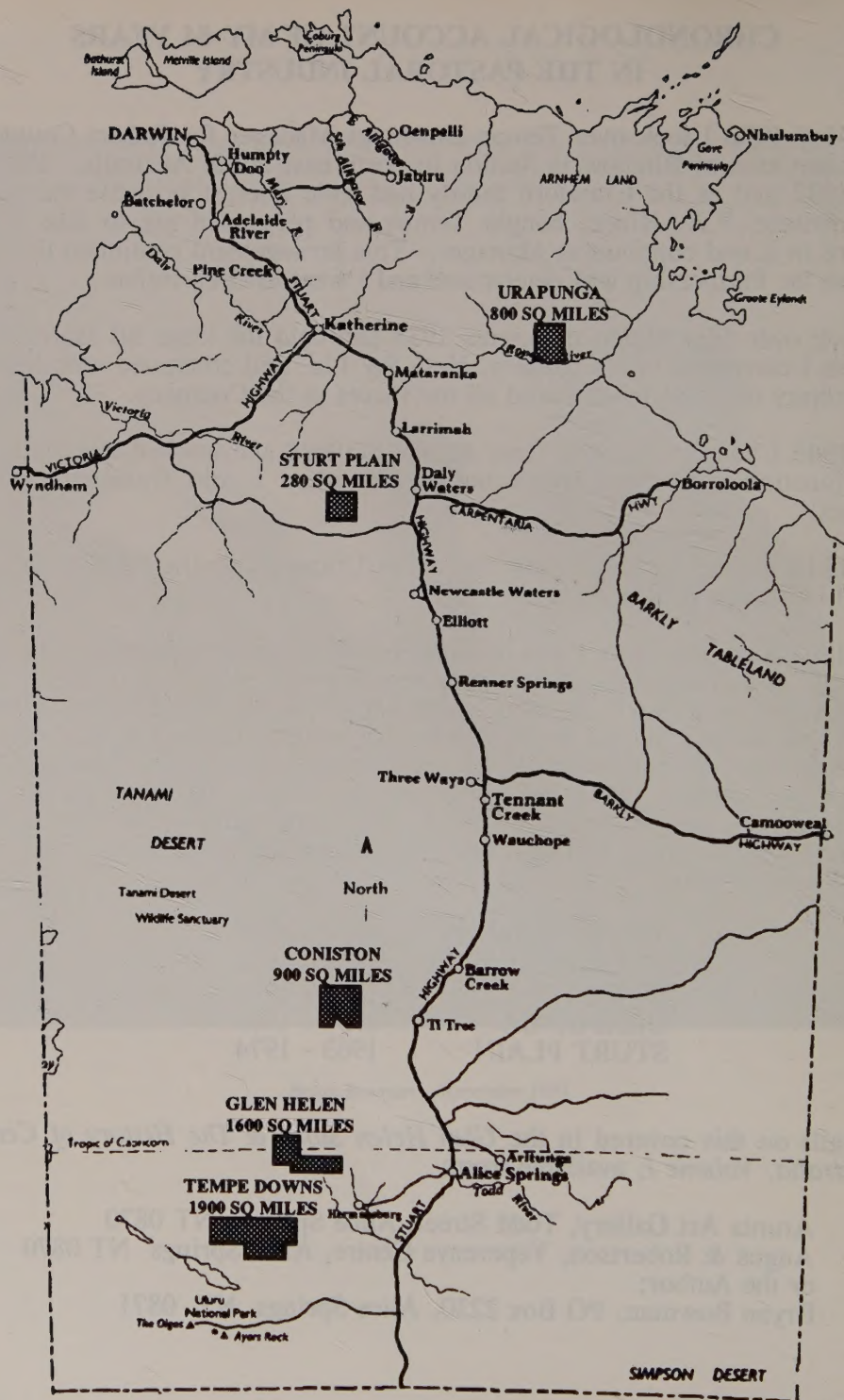
In 1963 I bought Sturt Plain, a small block of country between Newcastle Waters and Dunmara. It was very securely fenced and well watered and we used it as a depot for store cattle bought in the Top End for fattening on Glen Helen. It was originally an Agricultural Lease and as I couldn't comply with the conditions of an Agricultural Lease it was converted to a Grazing Licence. When the Katherine meat works started to get into full production it was no longer viable to buy store cattle in the Top End for fattening in the South and as a Grazing Licence cannot be sold I abandoned the Lease in 1974.

TEMPE DOWNS	1930 - 1938
GLEN HELEN	1938 - 1984
CONISTON	1946 - 1976
URAPUNGA	1954 - 1968
STURT PLAIN	1963 - 1974

Details on this covered in the *Glen Helen Story & The History of Central Australia, Volume I*, available from:

Arunta Art Gallery, Todd Street, Alice Springs NT 0870  
Angus & Robertson, Yeperenye Centre, Alice Springs NT 0870  
or the Author;  
Bryan Bowman, PO Box 2230, Alice Springs NT 0871

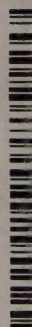








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